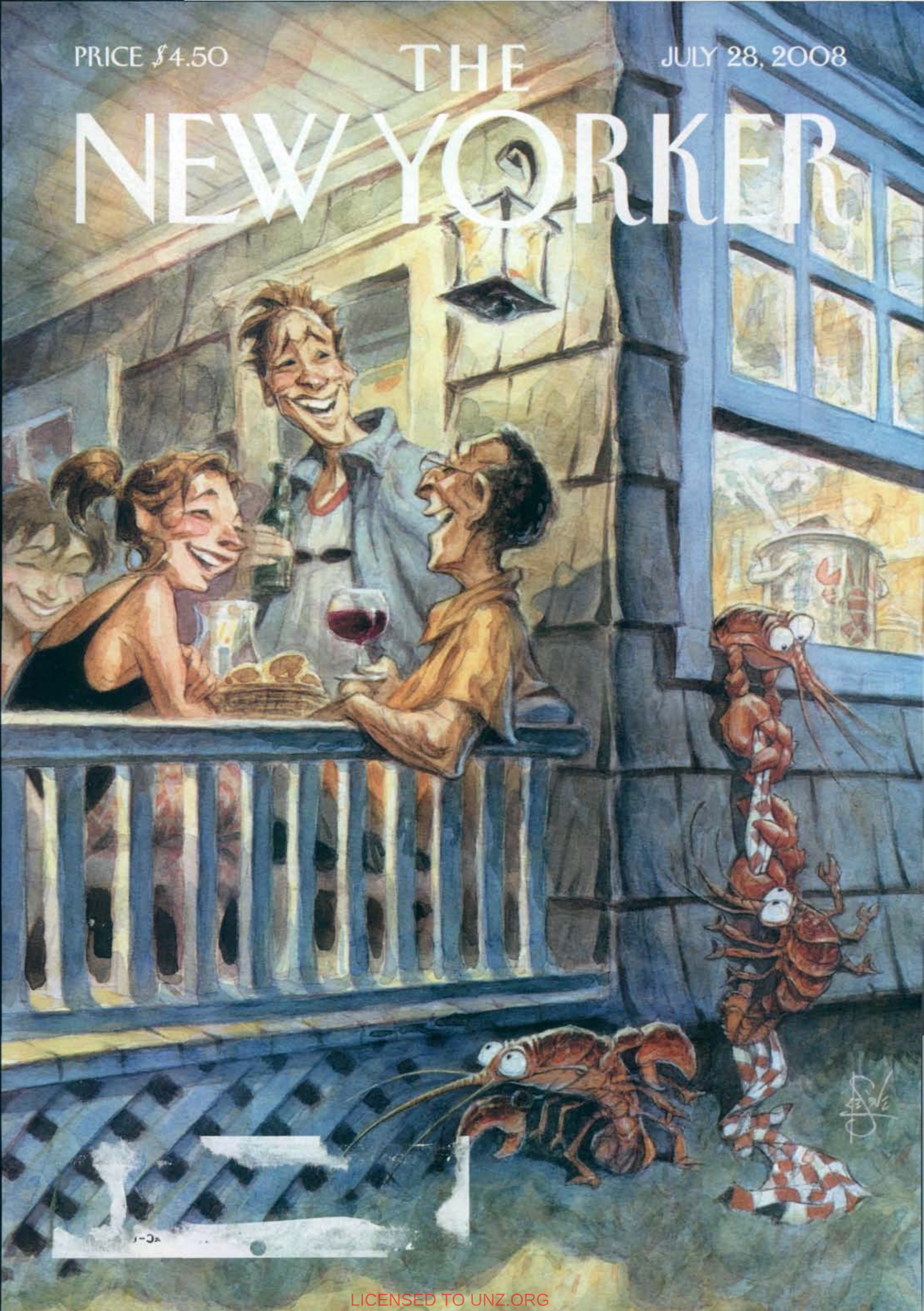

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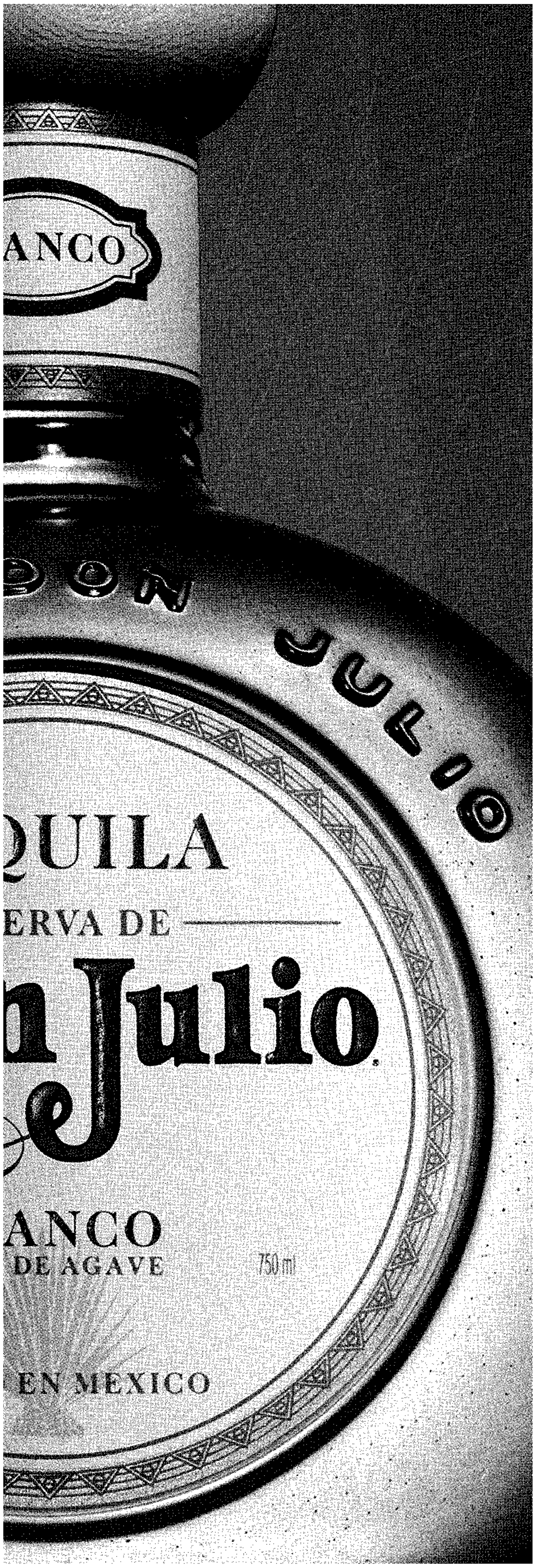
JULY 28, 2008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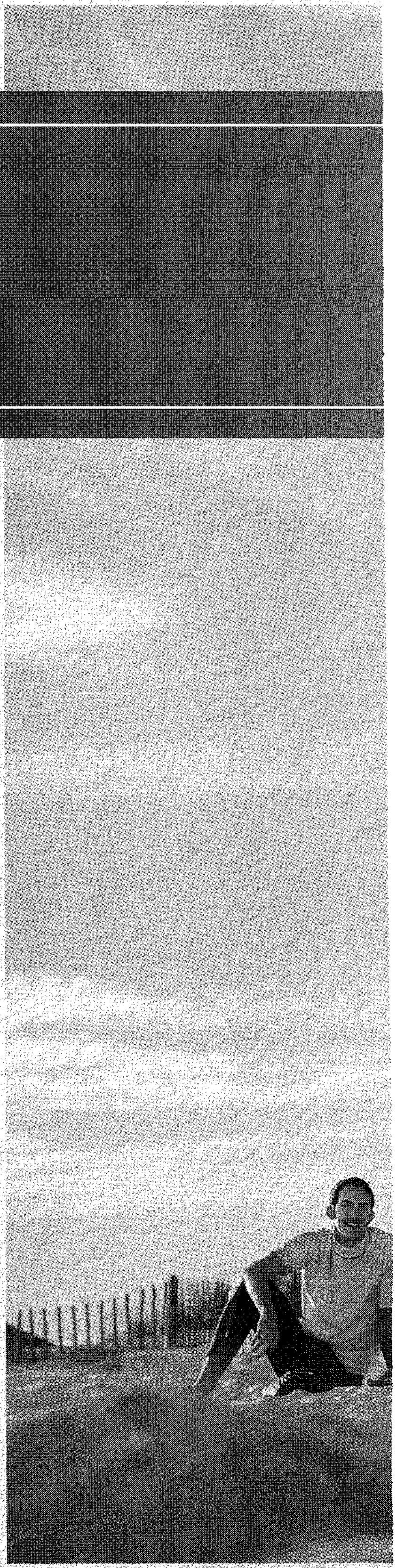

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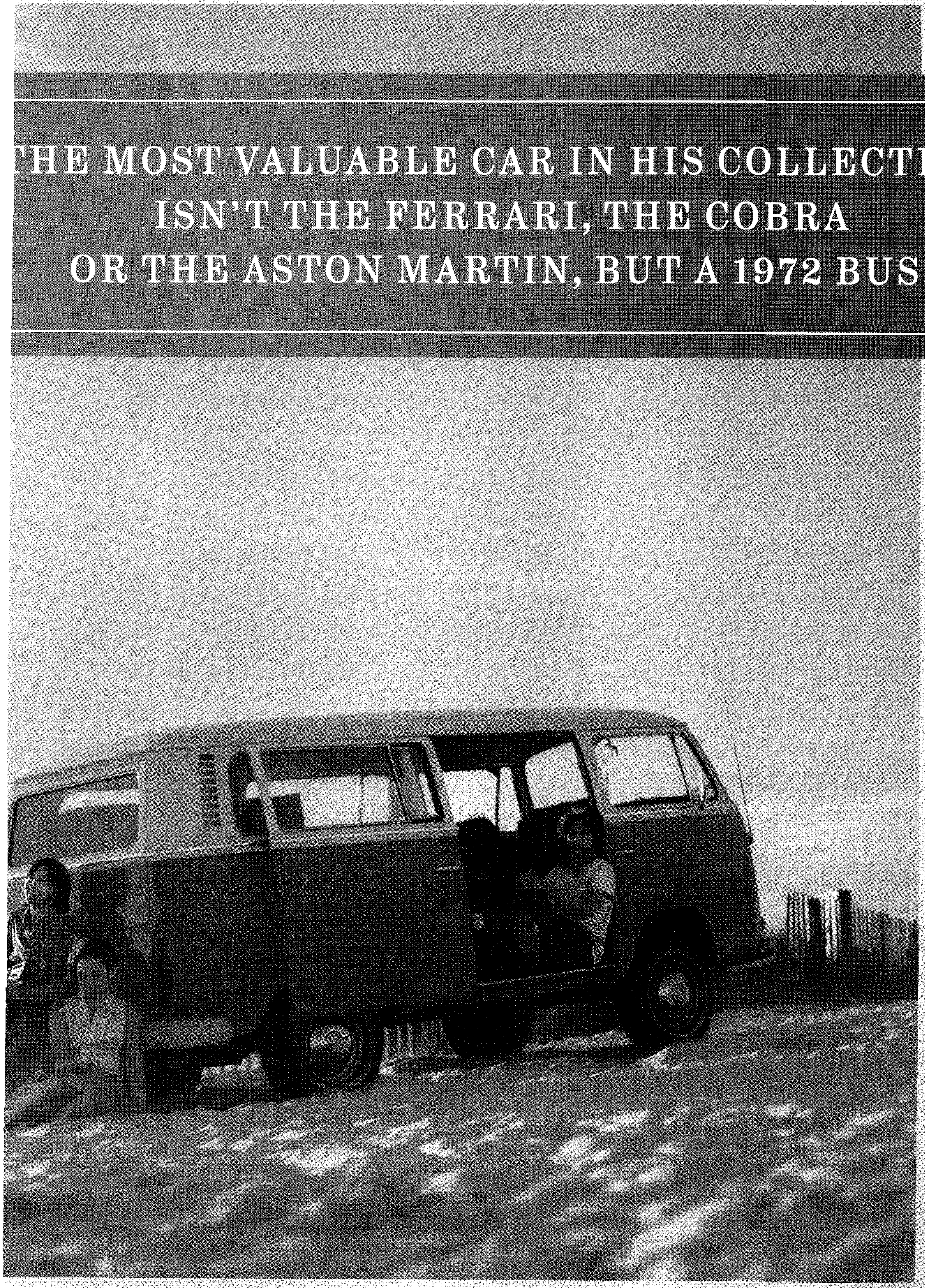

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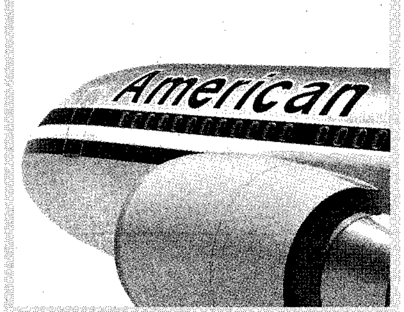

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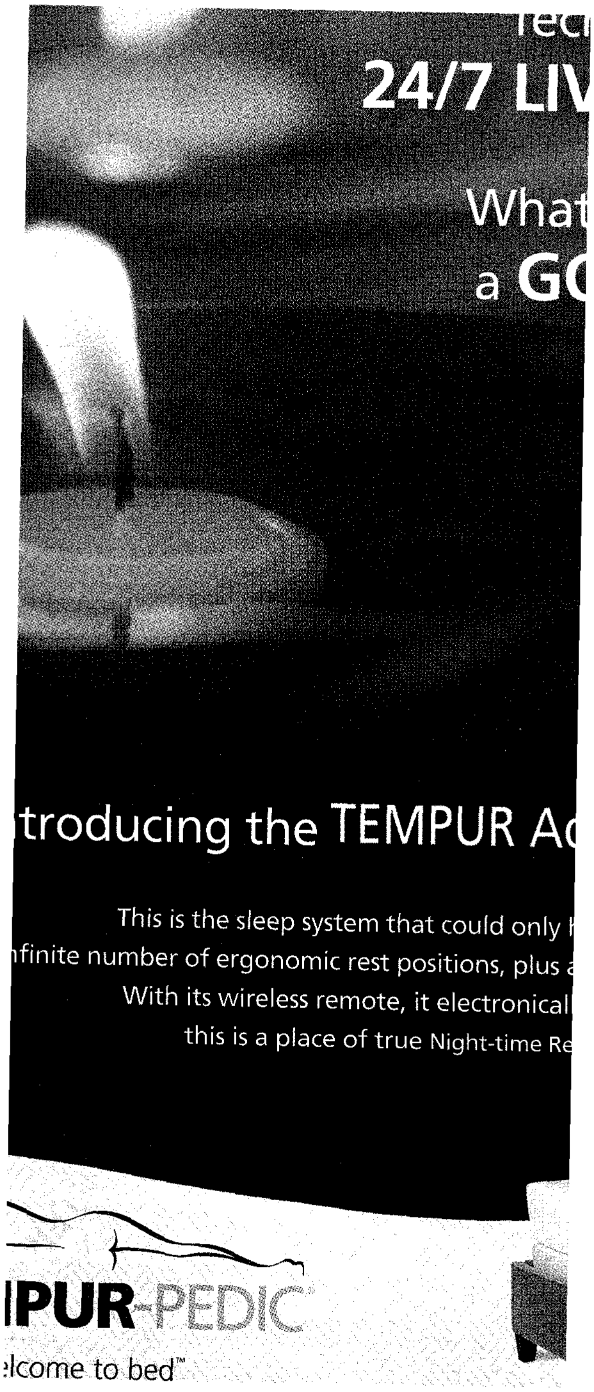Tec

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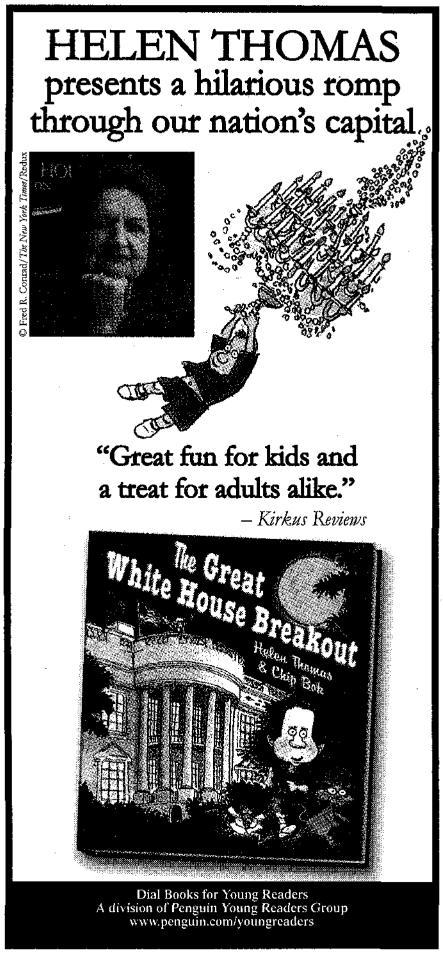
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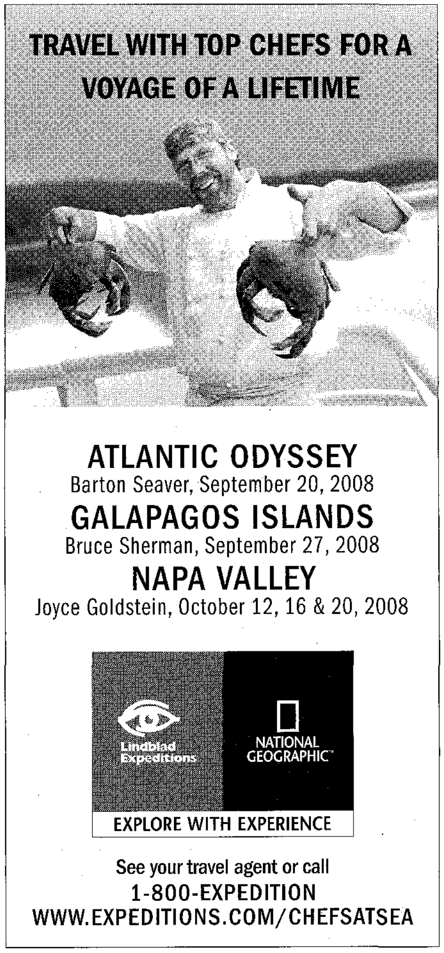
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Yehuda Amichai (Poem, p. 74), an Israeli writer, published several books of poetry and fiction before his death, in 2000. "Open Closed Open" is his latest collection of poems to be translated into English.

Hilton Als (The Theatre, p. 86) is a drama critic for the magazine.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ask the Author: *Evan Osnos* takes readers' questions about China. / *John Cassidy* discusses the election and the economy with *Ryan Lizza* and *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Campaign Trail podcast. / *David Samuels* talks about medical marijuana. / *Aleksandar Hemon* reads a Bernard Malamud story. / Blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *George Packer*, *Dana Goodyear*, and *Sasha Frere-Jones*, plus the Cartoon Lounge, the Book Bench, and Goings On. / From the archives: *David Sedaris* on marijuana, *John Lahr* on "Mamma Mia!" / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.

THE MAIL

JUDGING A COVER

Barry Blitt's cover, which aims to lampoon or satirize false conceptions of the Obamas, is, to put it mildly, inartful—a word being used these days to describe poorly expressed attempts at positive commentary ("The Politics of Fear," July 21st). But it also provides ammunition to further the very thing that it satirizes, and that is potentially very damaging to a worthy candidate. If you want to illustrate the politics of fear, then use something that really describes it: those who are the real fearmongers—not the victims of their atrocious lies.

Rusel DeMaria
Grants Pass, Ore.

Blitt's cover weaves together the smears hurled at Barack Obama by the far right, correctly pointing out the shameless absurdity of it all. And that's humor. When I laugh at this cartoon, I'm not laughing at Obama and I'm not buying into any of the smears. Rather, I'm laughing at the people who are perpetuating such lies. Will many voters not get the joke? Sure. But the cover should be used as a weapon against the lies that Blitt so skillfully portrays.

Lewis R. Colon, Jr.
Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Our country is simply not ready for this progressive idea of satire. It assumes that the often hidden feelings regarding race relations in this country have improved to the point where this type of (I must say creative) cartoon can be seen for what it is, rather than as another deployment of the (all-encompassing) fear that many white Americans have in relation to people of color. African-Americans see this as a terrible portrayal of two American icons in the making. I appreciate *The New Yorker's* sense of humor, but the timing could not have been worse.

Adam L. Dyson
Hollywood, Md.

Regardless of the artist's intent to produce satirical commentary, it is possible that the imagery may reinforce the fears and prejudices that it was meant to critique. But we should look past the noise about whether or not the cover is offensive, a red-herring issue with fairly predictable responses on all sides, to the deeper questions: Why is the label "Muslim" such a powerful and popular weapon against Obama? And what should the Obama camp be doing, instead of denouncing a magazine cover? What needs to be challenged at full volume is the association between a man in Muslim clothing and terrorism, and the underlying assumptions that being Muslim is the same as being un-American, that being Muslim is the same as being violent, that being Muslim is the same as being Osama bin Laden. Let us also remember that, while the issue of the cartoon's possible offensiveness is worth considering, it pales in comparison with the issues of foreign policy, hate crimes, racial profiling, civil liberties, warrantless surveillance, the economy, gas prices, health care, the environment, and religious intolerance that we all must weigh carefully in the coming months.

Kareem Shora
National Executive Director
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Washington, D.C.

I have to admit that at first I was shocked. Ultimately, I find Blitt's cover in poor taste and seemingly counterproductive. But the cartoon made me think. And it's made others think. In the end, it is a biting satire of conservatives' view of Michelle and Barack Obama. So I nervously hail *The New Yorker's* right to freedom of speech.

Andrew Russell
Brooklyn, N.Y.

•

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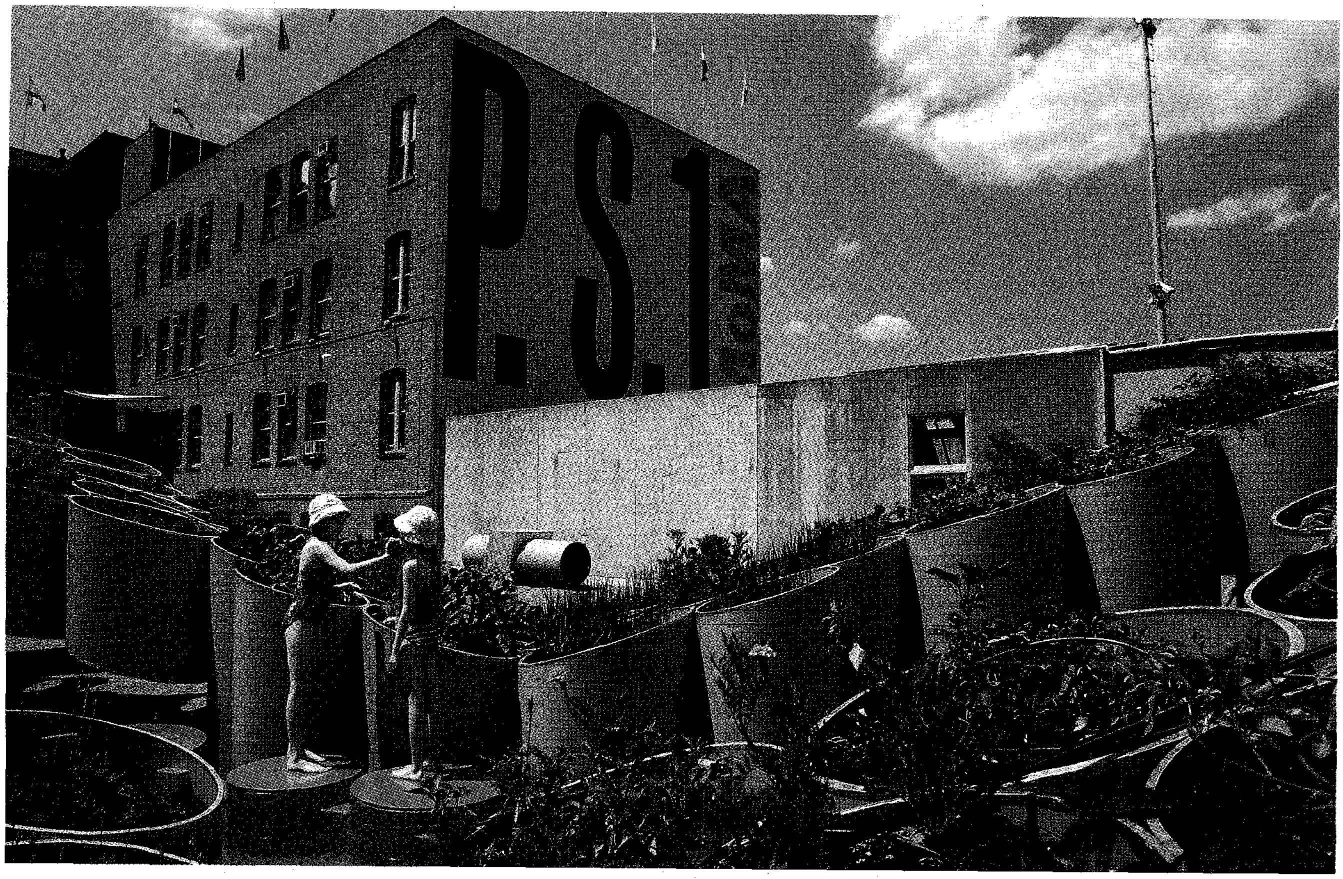

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
GOING PLACES

In October, the Primary Stages production of Horton Foote's comedy "Dividing the Estate," from last year, will transfer to Broadway, in a co-production with Lincoln Center Theatre. Meanwhile, this week, the company kicks off its 59E59 season with A. R. Gurney's "Buffalo Gal," a comedy about an aging television star who returns to her home town (and Gurney's) to act in a local staging of "The Cherry Orchard." (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
GOOD FOLKS

For a quarter of a century, Red House Records, of St. Paul, has kept alive the coffeehouse sound that Minnesota's native son Bob Dylan once helped make famous. The label celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary at Joe's Pub, with the singer-songwriters Lucy Kaplansky, Eliza Gilkyson, and Cliff Eberhardt. (See page 11.)

ART
PALM READING

"Early Buddhist Manuscript Painting: The Palm-Leaf Tradition," at the Met, delves into the museum's extensive holdings of rare Indian illuminations to focus on a single sacred text—the Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Widsom) Sutra. (See page 12.)

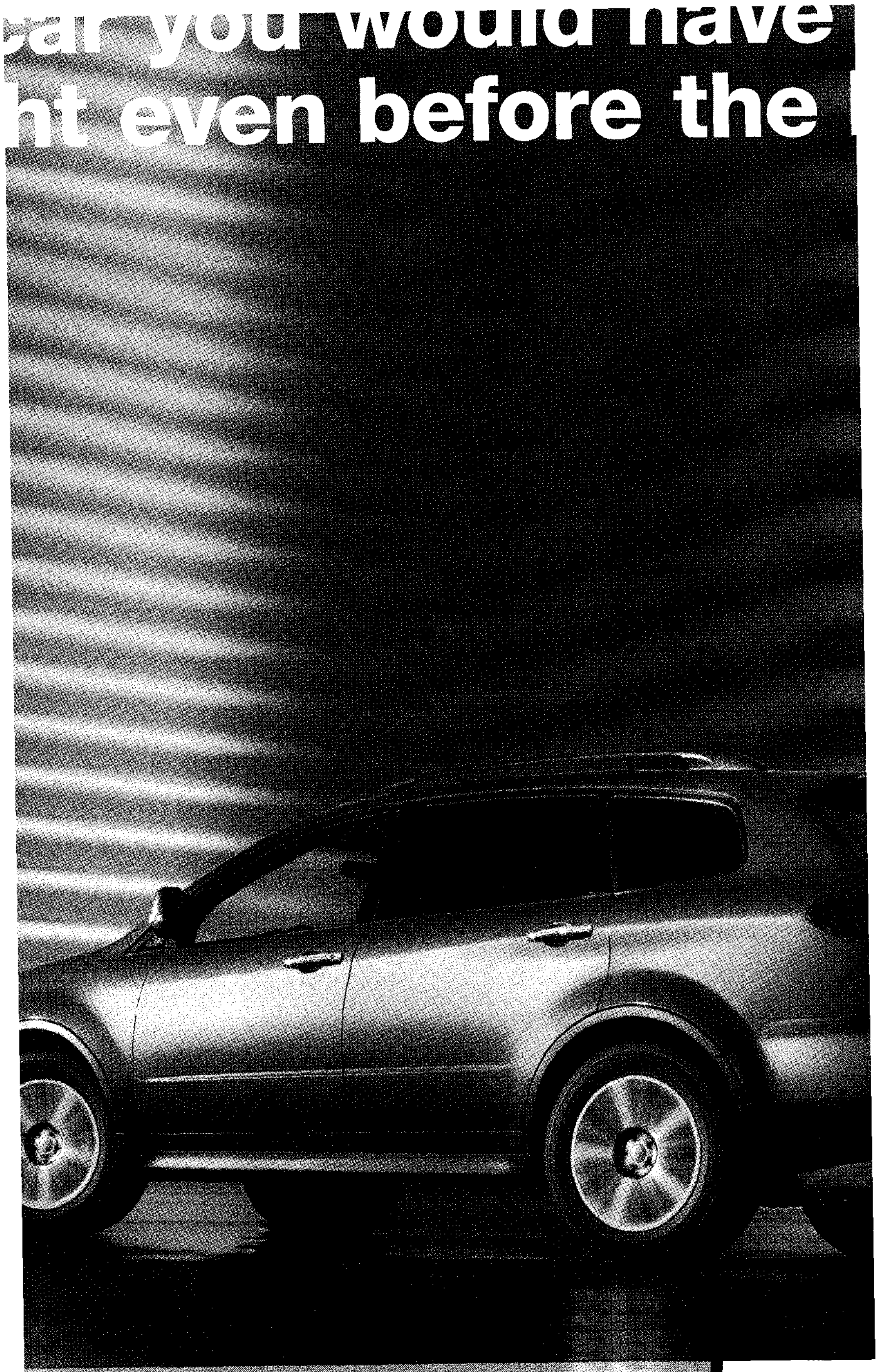
CLASSICAL MUSIC
OUT OF THE PAST

For music lovers, the term "Russian Baroque" may sound like an oxymoron. But a few composers did toil in the steppes back then, and the eminent early-music group Aston Magna will offer selections from their operatic and instrumental works in its concerts this week. (See page 16.)

MOVIES
LISTENING TO BRITAIN

The British director Robert Hamer (1911-63), the son of an actor, had a gift for eliciting subtle, sophisticated performances from his casts, especially in the films he made at Ealing Studios in the nineteen-forties. BAM offers four of his movies, including the harshly realistic "It Always Rains on Sunday," a recent revival hit, and the comedy "Kind Hearts and Coronets," starring Alec Guinness. (See page 18.)

Public Farm One, currently at P.S. 1. Photograph by Gus Powell.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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ANIMALS OUT OF PAPER
Second Stage's Uptown Series concludes with this play by Rajiv Joseph, an origami-themed love story. Giovanna Sardelli directs. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

BUFFALO GAL
Primary Stages opens its season with this play by A. R. Gurney, a comedy about a fading television star who returns to her home town, Buffalo, to perform in "The Cherry Orchard." Mark Lamos directs. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

FLAMINGO COURT
Jamie Farr and Anita Gillette star in this comedy by Luigi Creatore, about the residents of a South Florida condo complex. Steven Yuhasz directs. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

GIVE 'EM HELL, HARRY!
Bix Barnaba stars as Harry S. Truman in Samuel Gallu's play, about the life of the thirty-third President. Stan Mazin directs. In previews. Opens July 27. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE ROCK MUSICAL
Diane Paulus directs a cast of twenty-seven, led by Jonathan Groff ("Spring Awakening") and Will Swenson, following the success of the concert production last summer. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

SOME AMERICANS ABROAD
Second Stage revives Richard Nelson's comedy from 1989, about a group of American college students who travel to England with their professors. Anthony Rapp and Tom Cavanagh are part of the ensemble cast. Gordon Edelstein directs. In previews. Opens July 24. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

STAIN
Tony Glazer wrote this dark comedy, about the life and relationships of a fifteen-year-old boy. Scott C. Embler directs. Opens July 23. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

TWELVE OPHELIAS
Woodshed Collective presents Caridad Svich's play, a reinterpretation of "Hamlet," at the McCarren Park Pool. In previews. Opens July 24. (Lorimer St. at Bayard St., Brooklyn. Tickets, which are free, may be reserved at www.theatermania.com.)

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HATE ALL YOUR FRIENDS
Four Chairs Theatre Company presents the première of Larry Kunofsky's comedy, about a misanthropic man who becomes involved with a woman who runs a secret club. Jacob Krueger directs. In previews. Opens July 24. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS
Irish Rep and the Cincinnati Playhouse present Mark Brown's stage adaptation of the Jules Verne novel, set in 1872, about a British man who travels the globe to win a bet. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

CRAVE / SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC
The Potomac Theatre Project presents a double bill of one-acts about desire by the late British playwright Sarah Kane and the contemporary American playwright Neal Bell. In "Crave," Kane's engaging if indulgent dramatic tone poem, directed by Cheryl Faraone, four embittered and emotionally disturbed characters snap and shriek at each other as they stumble toward the same bleak conclusions: that love is pain, existence is meaningless, and life is futile. The actors do a very satisfying job with the dense and erratic text, but it is Adam Ludwig, as the seemingly abusive, lovesick character A, who really shines. Unfortunately, "Somewhere in the Pacific," Bell's study of soldiers stationed on a troopship during the Second World War, under the spotty direction of Jim Petosa, is tedious and clunky, despite the best efforts of the cast of seven. Both plays run in repertory with Howard Barker's "Scenes from an Execution." (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200. Through July 26.)

EAST 14TH
All hard childhoods have their funny moments, but few such childhoods are hilarious. Yet the audience can't stop laughing as Don Reed, in his one-man show, acts out the story of his dicey coming-of-age in an Oakland ghetto in the nineteen-seventies. Reed plays all the characters—his father, a hard-partying pimp; his stepfather, an abusive religious fanatic; his flamboyantly gay brother; and all manner of women, including his lost, sad mother—with both ease and inexhaustible energy. It's hard to imagine that the awkward kid who came up through such crude circumstances could be the confident man who wrote, directed, and stars in this little play, as much standup as it is theatre, and yet that's Reed's point: that East 14th was not just a street in Oakland but a path that formed a decent man. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

EAST TO EDINBURGH 2008
At 59E59, the fifth annual festival presents works on their way to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through July 27.)

GATE/BECKETT
As part of the Lincoln Center Festival, Dublin's Gate Theatre presents three one-man dramas by Samuel Beckett: "Eh Joe," starring Liam Neeson and directed by Atom Egoyan; "I'll Go On," starring Barry McGovern and directed by Colm O'Briain; and "First Love," starring Ralph Fiennes and directed by Michael Colgan. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre at John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500. Through July 25.)

KICKING A DEAD HORSE
Sam Shepard wrote and directs this play, starring Stephen Rea. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

MARIE ANTOINETTE: THE COLOR OF FLESH
Joel Gross wrote this fictionalized story about a love triangle involving Marie Antoinette, her portrait painter Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, and Count Alexis de Ligne. Robert Kalfin directs. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO
Roundabout Theatre Company presents Christopher Durang's dark comedy from 1985. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

PERFECT HARMONY
This likable music-filled comedy, by Andrew Grosso and the Essentials, features rival high-school a-cappella groups, the Acafellas and the Ladies in Red, who, in the course of preparing for nationals, train, freak out, stop speaking, and overcome their differences—and that's just within the teams themselves. Written and performed with an acute understanding of the anxieties and quirks of young achievers, the show derives much of its charm from the strange, horrible magic of the a-cappella genre: the exacting deployment of pitch, harmony, and musical arrangement joined with irony, pop culture, and earnestness. The singing and acting are strong, the song choices hilarious. Though the writing at times veers too far toward shtick and strains credulity, the production is redeemed by an abundance of heart. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

POTOMAC THEATRE PROJECT
The company's season includes Howard Barker's "Scenes from an Execution," starring Jan Maxwell, and Neal Bell's "Somewhere in the Pacific" and Sarah Kane's "Crave" (see review), in repertory. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200. Through July 26.)

THE STRANGERER
The Chicago troupe Theater Oobleck presents this comedy by Mickle Maher, which imagines George W. Bush and John Kerry debating

TABLES FOR TWO
ADOUR

adour
ALAIN DUCASSE

2 E. 55th St. (212-710-2277)—There are people, a dwindling lot, who are secure in their mortgages and to whom the spectre of five-dollar-a-gallon gas presents more a challenge than a threat. These people eat at Adour. The restaurant opened in the St. Regis several months ago, and it's as posh and pricey as the eatery of a landmarked hotel necessitates. It also constitutes the away team in a much-hyped rematch: the toughest of restaurant towns versus the Frenchest of chefs, the Michelin-star-studded Alain Ducasse. (An earlier New York venture by Ducasse, who operates twenty-one restaurants, including one in the Eiffel Tower, closed in 2006; of that spot, with its handbag perches and splatter art, the less said the better.) Ducasse may be the underdog, but those in a sporting mood will judge his new joint by what shows up at the ballpark. Let the game commence.

Adour, as a recent diner put it, "feels like a jewelry box," rectangular and pewter-colored, with floridly etched glass and burgundy banquettes. Waiters stand along the perimeter, as solemn as tennis ball boys, before dashing hither and thither to perform solicitous acts and utter hushed the-pleasure-is-all-mine-sirs and think-nothing-of-it-ma'ams. The food is exquisitely executed French: duck foie-gras terrine, striped bass in sauce *vin jaune*, chicken fillet *à l'unilatéral*. A delicately light zucchini ravioli, floating in foamy vegetable broth, is itself a jewel. One impressive entrée offers flavorful pig three ways: lean, tender pork tournedos, served with sides of pork belly and *boudin noir*. Adour's pièce de résistance is a provocative dessert that combines, to sublime effect, vacherin with coconut, mango marmalade, and passion-fruit emulsion—so good it should be sold in takeout tubs.

There is, though, the matter of drink. Ask the sommelier to assist with the seventy-five-page wine book and he will exhibit a Seussian exuberance: "Oh, there are so many places we could go!" But the fares to those places often exceed two hundred dollars. For nine thousand dollars, bring your own and keep it in a well-positioned locker engraved with your name. This is, as a waiter explained, with nose only slightly upturned, "a little commercial for yourself." There is also the private tasting room, in which a cutting-edge, interactive wine book is splayed across a banquet table in a dazzle of photons. Set it to "Dark Side of the Moon," and it's better than the Trenton planetarium. "We kicked a taster out last night," the waiter disclosed. "He had had, simply, too much to drink." Away 1, Home 0. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $32-$49.)

—Mike Peed

HONORE BROWN

themes found in the works of Camus. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

[TITLE OF SHOW]
A meta-musical about two guys trying to write a musical may sound suspect, but the result, with a book by Hunter Bell and music and lyrics by Jeff Bowen, who also star, turns out to be a joy from start to finish—original, clever, and surprisingly moving. Bell and Bowen, joined by their actress friends (and now co-stars) Susan Blackwell and Heidi Blickenstaff, create a musical in three weeks and submit it to a festival; brainstorming sessions, foulmouthed pep talks, jokes about drag-queen names and Broadway flops, and an in-song argument about whether "sweeter" rhymes with "theatre" all make it into the show, as does each new chapter in its progression from idea to possible hit. That we know the ending—we're watching it on Broadway—only heightens the fun. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
Alex Timbers directs Christopher Durang's "Beyond Therapy," starring Kate Burton, Katie Finneran, and Darrell Hammond, through July 27. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
Matthew Wilkas and Mark Setlock's satire about children's beauty pageants, "Pageant Play," is staged at the Unicorn, through July 26. On the Main Stage, Richard Corley directs "A Man for All Seasons," Robert Bolt's drama about Sir Thomas More. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"Cymbeline," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays on the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, in repertory with "Twelfth Night" and "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)." For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
On the Nikos Stage, Scott Ellis directs the world première of Theresa Rebeck's comedy "The Understudy," starring Kristen Johnston, Bradley Cooper, and Reg Rogers. On the Main Stage, through July 27, Michael Greif directs "Three Sisters," translated by Paul Schmidt; the cast includes Jessica Hecht, Roberta Maxwell, and Manoel Felciano. For a full festival schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ARIAS WITH A TWIST: HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CIRQUE DREAMS "JUNGLE FANTASY":** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **DAMN YANKEES:** City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through July 27. **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY DANCES WITH THE STARS!:** 47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **LIFE IN A MARITAL INSTITUTION:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THURGOOD:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

Celebrate Brooklyn! presents Ghostland Observatory.

KYLE T. WEBSTER

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—July 23: **Jefferson Starship** is piloted by the guitarist, sci-fi buff, and Jefferson Airplane founder Paul Kantner. Unlike the sixties incarnation Airplane, Jefferson Starship set its sights on commercial success. And it succeeded, in the seventies and eighties, with a string of arena-rock hits. The band eventually succumbed to the standard rock-industry stresses of substance abuse, egomania, and lawsuits. A version of the group, without Kantner, circled the charts under the name Starship some twenty years ago. Recently, though, Kantner returned to the controls. July 28: Once upon a time, after the Beatles hit it big, four teen-age brothers were inspired to form a rock-and-roll band. They called it the **Cowsills** (their family name) and made a little noise in and around Newport, Rhode Island. Their mother, little brother, and little sister joined the group at the command of their tyrannical father/manager, and they scored a national smash with "The Rain, the Park, and Other Things," in 1967. They became the inspiration for "The Partridge Family," which seriously damaged their credibility. Two of the founding members have died, but there are still four Cowsills in the band. Expect Stones covers, along with "Hair" and "Indian Lake."

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—July 25: The British garage-rock trio the **Subways** has weathered health problems (singer Billy Lunn had vocal nodes removed early last year) and early success (the U.K. press went head over heels three years ago for its début album, "Young for Eternity") to develop a powerfully plaintive sound. July 26: Liverpool's **Dead or Alive** will forever labor in the long shadow of its sole major hit, "You Spin Me Round (Like a Record)," from 1985. But that song is just part of the Dead or Alive story. The band has been active for nearly thirty years, and it continues to make thrusting dance music. Its lead singer and visual focal point, Pete Burns, has made a life of reinvention, becoming a TV personality, thanks to his appearance on the British reality show "Celebrity Big Brother," and he's spent untold sums on plastic surgery to push his penchant for androgyny to striking levels.

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—July 26: **Ghostland Observatory**, a long-haired duo from Austin that favors capes, tight pants, and eclectic electronic dance music, delivers kinetic performances that get crowds up on their feet and moving. With Brooklyn's **Jealous Girlfriends** and others.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—July 23: A benefit concert for this series with **Mark Knopfler**, the former Dire Straits front man. July 27: The record label Putumayo World Music celebrates its fifteenth anniversary with the warm island sounds of the **Skatalites**, the cool blues of the guitarist **Taj Mahal**, and other acts. July 29: The classic rockers **Crosby, Stills & Nash** do their part to raise money for the outdoor concert series.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—July 23: With her new album, "I Know You're Married but I've Got Feelings Too," **Martha Wainwright** sprints to the lead of the Wainwright-McGarrigle-Roche pack of singer-songwriters. The collection is a delicate yet seething combination of styles and emotions, and Wainwright can be expected to deliver onstage. She's quirky, funny, and mad as hell. July 27: The **Hypnotic Brass Ensemble** is a group of eight brothers (plus a drummer), originally from Chicago, who write their own jazz- and New Orleans-influenced songs.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—July 23: The Argentinean rock bands **Contramano, Coral,** and **Ulisespal.** July 24: **Lucy Kaplansky, Eliza Gilkyson,** and **Cliff Eberhardt** celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Red House Records.

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL
After an extended European outing, **Laurie Anderson** brings her "Homeland" tour back to New York City. Anderson's latest work is a meditation on the political, psychic, and poetic state of America, and, as is customary, she gives the material full multimedia treatment. Leading a group of extraordinary musicians and singing and speaking with a diction all her own, Anderson creates a somewhat unsettling but always arresting visual and sonic performance. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. For more information, visit www.lincolncenter.org. July 22-26.)

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING
The annual dancing under the stars at Lincoln Center comes to a close this week. The action is taking place not on Fountain Plaza, the traditional location, which is a sea of construction owing to the center's ongoing renovations, but rather in nearby Damrosch Park. There's still a dance floor, though, and lessons preceding the shows. July 23: An evening of samba with **Mart'nália**, the daughter of the samba giant Martinho da Vila. July 24: Jump blues and swing with **Lavay Smith & Her Red Hot Skillet Lickers.** July 25: A pair of Spanish acts bring their outré sounds to the dance floor. First up is Barcelona's **La Troba Kung-Fú**, which mixes rumba, *cumbia*, dub, and the kitchen sink. This is the first time the band is playing the United States. Next, **Peret**, the king of Catalan rumba, makes his New York City début. July 26: The **Spanish Harlem Orchestra** delivers a night of salsa. (For more information, visit www.lincolncenter.org.)

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
July 23: The **Punch Brothers** are led by the mandolinist Chris Thile, recently of Nickel Creek. (Rockefeller Park.) July 24-25: The local gospel-tinged ensemble **Ollabelle** pays homage to Johnny Cash. (World Financial Center Plaza.) July 24: **Akron/Family** is capable of chaotic, acid-rock guitar solos, repetitive group singing, and soft, finger-picked acoustic laments. (Castle Clinton, Battery Park.) July 26: An even bigger tribute to the Man in Black, with **Ollabelle, Benevento/Russo Duo, Laura Cantrell, Catherine Russell,** and the **Persuasions.** (World Financial Center Winter Garden.) (For more information, visit www.rivertorivernyc.com.)

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—July 25: Ondi Timoner's 2004 documentary, "DiG!," portrayed the **Brian Jonestown Massacre** as a band splintered by infighting and megalomania (largely owing to lead singer Anton Newcombe's iron-willed eccentricity). Nonetheless, the group has endured, and it has a new album, "My Bloody Underground," which finds Newcombe firing on all cylinders and channelling the hazy aesthetic of the Velvet Underground and My Bloody Valentine.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—July 29: The **Butthole Surfers,** from Texas, were equally celebrated and reviled during their mid-nineties heyday. One of the more adventurous bands to crawl out of the American underground, the Surfers fused the aggressive nihilism of punk rock with an acid-damaged sensibility. Their albums were littered with profanity and their live shows were always full of humorous chaos. The current tour marks the reunion of the band's classic Reagan-era lineup. As a curious twist, they'll be flanked by the **Paul Green School of Rock Music All-Stars,** a collection of ambitious youngsters who, one hopes, will survive the experience unscathed.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—July 23-26: **Trio 3.** Three veterans with deep experience in both mainstream and free jazz—the saxophonist **Oliver Lake,** the bassist **Reggie Workman,** and the drummer **Andrew Cyrille,** are joined by a younger, but no less imaginative and unclassifiable player, the pianist **Geri Allen.**

"Muñeca, 1974/2007," by Carlos Perez Siquier, in "The Good Life," at Richardson.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—July 22-27: A heroine in her native Japan, the pianist **Hiromi** employs keyboard pyrotechnics to intensify her fusion-infused compositions. Here, her Sonicbloom band includes the jazz and rock guitarist **David Fiuczynski.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—July 22-27: A quintet led by the husband-and-wife duo of the singer **Flora Purim** and the percussionist **Airto Moreira** refracts the music of Brazil through a modern-jazz lens. The group is rounded out by the guitarist **Toninho Horta,** the pianist **Kenny Werner,** and the bassist **Mark Egan.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—July 24-27: The caustic pianist, singer and tunesmith **Mose Allison** hasn't released an album of new material in some time, but his sterling favorites and his brilliantly reworked standards and blues insure that the evening will be a delight. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ IN JULY
Under the artistic direction of the estimable pianist **Bill Charlap,** the 92nd Street Y presents another season to justify a trip uptown. Highlights this week include a tribute to Leonard Bernstein with **Kurt Elling,** on July 22; the annual piano jam with **Billy Taylor** and others, on July 23; and a Brazilian jazz show, on July 29. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Through July 31.)

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—On his current album, "Cultural Survival," the saxophonist **David Sánchez** (here with a quartet July 24-27) is joined by the guitarist **Lage Lund,** whose fluent playing adds an atypical flair to the leader's Latin-infused compositions. July 28: The pianist **JoAnne Brackeen** concludes her run of Mondays here by welcoming the saxophonist **Ravi Coltrane** to her quartet.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
July 27: The saxophonist **Ted Nash,** a stalwart of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, spreads his wings with a quartet featuring two of his associates from the defunct Jazz Composers Collective, the pianist **Frank Kimbrough** and the bassist **Ben Allison.** (The performance takes place in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden; concertgoers should use the entrance on W. 54th St. between Fifth and Sixth Aves. For more information, call 212-708-9491.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—July 22-27: The **Victor Lewis** quintet. The venerated drummer, composer, and bandleader Lewis can summon up hard-bop hurricanes from behind his kit. He's joined here by the well-weathered associates **Seamus Blake,** on saxophone, and **Bruce Barth,** on piano, among others. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"J. M. W. Turner."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Medieval and Renaissance Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Framing a Century: Master Photographs, 1840-1940."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Early Buddhist Manuscript Painting: The Palm-Leaf Tradition."** Opens July 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Dalí: Painting and Film"** considers the Surrealist's canvases—with their dissolves, projections, and flattened yet deep space—in light of his long-term involvement in cinema. Crowd-pleasing paintings like "The Persistence of Memory" (1931) are flanked by film clips: the ever-unsettling "Un Chien Andalou" (co-written with Luis Buñuel in 1929) screens, as do "L'Âge d'Or" (1930), the dream sequence from Hitchcock's "Spellbound" (1944), and Andy Warhol's 1966 Dali screen test. The cinematic highlight may be the delightfully perverse "Destino," a frothy concoction of baseball, ballet, and horology. Dali sketched the animated short for Walt Disney, whom he praised as "one of the great American Surrealists." Unfinished in 1946, it was completed by Disney animators in 2003. Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"Bernd and Hilla Becher: Landscape/Topology."** Through Aug. 25. ♦ **"Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling."** Through Oct. 20. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—A tremendous steel spider opens **"Louise Bourgeois,"** a tour through six decades of sculpture, painting, drawing, installation, and filmed performance by the French-born New York-based artist. Paintings from the forties presage the stacked totemic assemblages of the fifties, which segue to phallic carved marbles, tuberous bronzes, enclosed "Cells," and stitched-fabric objects. Bourgeois's approach has become more precise over the years, as raw anger has ceded ground to fierce intellect. Her depictions of the muscle and blood beneath the skin of domestic life, her idiosyn-

cratic lexicon, and her ability to elicit a visceral reaction sharpen as one ascends the chronologically arranged spiral. Through Sept. 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Paul McCarthy: Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement."** Through Oct. 12. ♦ **"Polaroids: Mapplethorpe."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ **"Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4, 2009. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Ardeshir Mohassess: Art and Satire in Iran."** Through Aug. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"How Soon Is Now?"** Participants in the museum's 2008 Artists in the Marketplace program exhibit their work. Through Aug. 18. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Philip Guston: Works on Paper."** Through Aug. 31. ♦ **"Illuminating the Medieval Hunt."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"The 183rd Annual."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"After Nature."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Altoids Award: Ei Arakawa, Lauren Kelley, Michael Patterson-Carver, and Michael Stickrod."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ This year's winner of the museum's annual Young Architects Program is the New York-based firm WORK, whose **"P.F. 1 (Public Farm One)"** has transformed the museum's austere courtyard into a working organic garden installed on an undulating terrace of recyclable cardboard barrels. A rainwater-collection system feeds a wading pool while irrigating peppers, zucchini, tomatoes, lettuces, beets, sunflowers, and herbs. Chickens range in a side pen. There is, however, a sign that we're not entirely back to the garden: a solar-powered cell-phone-charging station. Through Sept. 8. ♦ **"James Turrell's Meeting."** The artist's "skyspace" installation will be open at sunset on Saturdays. Through Sept. 6. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s."** Through July 28. ♦ **"Michael Portnoy: Casino Ilinx."** Through July 28. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kehinde Wiley: The World Stage: Africa, Lagos ~ Dakar."** Through Oct. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

FRANK GOHLKE
Along with Lewis Baltz, Henry Wessel, and Robert Adams, Gohlke was one of the so-called New Topographics photographers whose cool, unsentimental images redefined the perception of the American landscape in the seventies. This excellent exhibition provides a quick refresher course on his work since then, capped with a group of recent pictures taken on the streets of Queens. Gohlke's subjects—driveways, façades, intersections, shrubbery—are so ordinary that they practically repel attention. But the quotidian has its own weird power, and these photographs tap into it again and again. A scrawny tree and a street sign on an empty road are all Gohlke needs to hook and hold us. Through Aug. 22. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

EDITH MAYBIN
This Canadian photographer's New York début is bound to provoke some double takes. Maybin has combined images of herself and her disconcertingly beautiful young daughter so seamlessly that you don't know where one stops and the other takes over. The results are sometimes a genuine metamorphosis, but they can also be freakish: four legs (two are the child's) emerge from a womanly torso with a little girl's head. Maybin plays some Surrealist games—one is straight out of Magritte—but her work is not just gimmicky. She probes identity, sexual self-consciousness, and the bond between mother and daughter to memorably unsettling ends. Through Aug. 28. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070.)

"DEEP COMEDY"
Organized by the artist Dan Graham and the curator Sylvia Chivaratanond, this group show may fall short of profound, but it's ebullient summer fare. Michael Smith and Joshua White's mockumentary advertises a wellness center that doubles as an artists' colony. John Wesley's painting turns Leda and the swan into a freaked-out duck pursued by a balding gentleman naked but for his socks. Roman Signer contributes absurdist daredevilry (documented in a video) involving explosives, an office chair, and a hat, while Julia Scher's twelve marble dogs look sombrely on. Among the other comedians are John Baldessari, Isa Genzken, Christian Jankowski, and Allen Ruppersberg. Through July 30. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

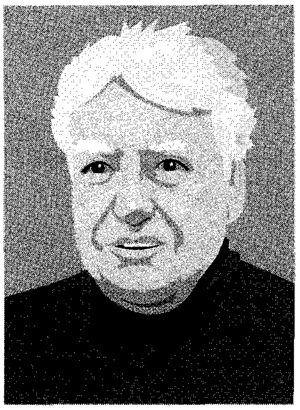
BOB COLACELLO
Colacello, the editor of *Interview* from 1971 to 1983, when Andy Warhol was still very much in charge, also wrote the magazine's addictive social diary, a monthly column called "Out." These black-and-white photographs of everyone from Halston to Robert Rauschenberg to C. Z. Guest were originally taken for that column and, like Warhol's own snapshots, they're the work of an insider with a paparazzo's killer instincts. At their best, Colacello's party pictures are at once cozy and cheeky—not critiques but witty observations. If the effect is somewhat blunted here by reproduction and repetition, the original prints still have plenty of kick. Through July 25. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

MAT COLLISHAW
In "The Writing of the Disaster," Maurice Blanchot claimed that language is impotent in the face of catastrophe. The same can't be said of pictures: a photograph of a dirty, near-naked child in the arms of a fleeing adult is enough to strike terror into most hearts. Collishaw staged such images and presents them here as daguerreotypes and projec-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HAND TO HAND

Dominique Delouche's "Katia and Volodia" (1988)—about Vladimir Vasiliev and Ekaterina Maximova, the Bolshoi's star couple during the nineteen-sixties—shows us the famous pair dancing in chandelier-hung rehearsal rooms and riding a sleigh to their cozy dacha: a smoothly cropped picture of their lives in the Soviet Union. But Delouche's dance films are precious, because they show how ballet works: hand to hand. We see, first, the young Maximova and Vasiliev being rehearsed by their great Bolshoi elders; then the two in performance (there's terrific archival footage); then rehearsals where, past performing now, they teach young dancers their roles. Watching these last, you may say to yourself that you'd still rather see Vasiliev, however old, do the role. What soul! What pecs! "Katia and Volodia," plus Delouche's films about Maya Plisetskaya, Alicia Markova, Violette Verdy, and others, will screen this week, at the Walter Reade, by the Film Society of Lincoln Center. Delouche will speak.

—*Joan Acocella*



QUICKHONEY

tions. Allusions to war—Nick Ut's famous post-napalm-attack Vietnam photograph comes to mind—and the Pietà are heavy-handed, but the biggest problem with Collishaw's project is that it crosses the line between a critique of disaster-as-spectacle and emotional manipulation. Through July 31. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

"SOME THING ELSE"
A violent performance with no actor (an installation by David Adamo), a protest sign with no message (an absurdist sculpture by Charles Goldman): this witty, intelligent show, organized by Simone Subal, presents works in which absence activates form. Sit on Julien Bismuth's carpet-covered cube and feel an audio text rumble up your spine. In Erin Shirreff's moody video, the planes of a model Tony Smith sculpture are visible only when covered in snow. Mika Tajima's high-design prints on wheels, which double as a screen for a slide show of past performances, evoke a missing figure, a theme reiterated by Nin Brudermann's wacky project, centered on a patented bodysuit. Through Aug. 1. (Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055.)

Short List

FIA BACKSTRÖM: White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through July 26. **HARRY DODGE AND STANYA KAHN:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through Aug. 2. **PAUL FUSCO:** Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778. Through July 31. **TETSUMI KUDO:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through Aug. 15. **"THE GOOD LIFE":** Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through Aug. 22. **"IDLE YOUTH":** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Aug. 15. **"NOT SO SUBTLE SUBTITLE":** Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335. Through Aug. 1. **"PAINTING NOW AND FOREVER, PART II":** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770; Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0020. Through Aug. 15.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JODIE VICENTA JACOBSON
If Jacobson seems stalled in the "emerging" phase of her career, maybe it's because her photographs are inherently reticent. It doesn't help that two of the best pictures in her current show are hung out of plain view (one is in the bathroom), or that the other photographs have no obvious connection to each other, but each image is assured and absorbing. The mood is contemplative but distracted, with suggestions of a road trip: sunlight glowing through trees, figures silhouetted against a wall of drapes, a wakeful child tucked under covers, water churning under a waterfall. Narrative dissolves; pleasure remains. Through July 31. (Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-228-1195.)

Short List

VITO ACCONCI: Albion, 102 Prince St. 212-343-3959. Through Aug. 1. **FRANCISCO DE GOYA:** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441. Through Aug. 1. **"NO WAVE":** KS Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918. Through July 31. **"PRETTY UGLY":** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258; Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through Aug. 29.

DANCE

PILOBOLUS
The company concludes its annual residency at the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 22-23 at 7:30, July 24-25 at 8, and July 26 at 2 and 8.)

360° DANCE COMPANY
The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Site-lines" series continues, with this troupe of former Martha Graham dancers (Alessandra Prosperi, Erica Dankmeyer, and 360's artistic director, Martin Løfsnes) performing "Maktub," a new work by the Atlanta Ballet choreographer Lauri Stallings, at South Street Seaport's Pier 17. (July 22-23 and July 28-30 at noon and 1.)

"DOMINIQUE DELOUCHE, BALLET CINÉASTE"
The Film Society of Lincoln Center features a retrospective of the French filmmaker Dominique Delouche, who started out working with Fellini on movies such as "La Dolce Vita" but found his true vocation in documenting the lives of the great ballet dancers of his time. His dance portraits—of Bolshoi stars Ekaterina Maximova and her irresistible husband, Vladimir Vasiliev; the charming and intelligent Balanchine muse Violette Verdy; the iron-willed Maya Plisetskaya, and others—are crafted out of engaging interviews, archival footage, and illuminating coaching sessions in which these living legends pass down their insights to a new generation of dancers. For a full schedule, visit www.filmlinc.com. (Walter Reade, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5600. July 23-27.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA
The traditional flamenco company and its extraordinary star, Soledad Barrio, return to Theatre 80. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. July 23-25 at 8, July 26 at 2 and 8, and July 27 at 5. Through Aug. 14.)

ADELE MYERS AND DANCERS
Myers brings two works to Joyce SoHo. "Is That All There Is" satirizes modern motherhood, set to the songs of Dolly Parton and Peggy Lee. "What We Have Is Half of What We Wish For . . ." experiments with sound collage and video to explore the gap between the world as we would like it and the world as it is, and how technology alters that space. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. July 24-26 at 8.)

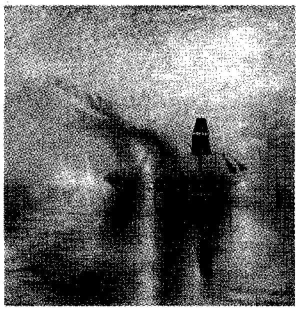
KEIGWIN + COMPANY
An entertainer of a high order, Larry Keigwin makes dances that can be campy, naughty, perceptive, compassionate, showbiz clever, and kinetically thrilling; usually, they're more substantial than their light touch might suggest. His company makes its Joyce début with "Elements," in which Keigwin's uncommon imagination works the common theme of earth, fire, air, and water, to music from Mozart and Chopin to Patsy Cline and Devo. Performances alternate with programs by Battleworks. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 28 at 7:30. Through Aug. 1.)

BATTLEWORKS DANCE COMPANY
Robert Battle's five-year-old troupe cannot be faulted for lack of effort. When the choreographer calls for Superman takeoffs that land with a smack, bodies splayed on the floor, his dancers don't hesitate a bit. Like many of his works, Battle's new "Reel Time" has a tribal intensity, part African, part rocking out. "Ella" is a tour-de-force solo, one woman trying to follow the bouncing path of Ms. Fitzgerald's scatting, and sometimes succeeding. "In/Side," a fit of possession set to Nina Simone, asks as much from its solo male dancer. "Juba," created for the Ailey company, builds from ritual stomping into frenzy, while "Overture" clothes its frenzy in teal gowns and Bach. Performances at the Joyce alternate with programs by Keigwin + Company. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 29 at 7:30. Through Aug. 2.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
July 23-27: At the Ted Shawn, Alonzo King's LINES Ballet presents "Migration," from 2006, which delves into the movements of the natural world, especially birds, and is set to a multi-hued score by the jazz experimenter Pharoah Sanders. The striking, meditative "Rasa" (2007) explores the configurations and patterns found within the complex rhythms of Carnatic (classical Southern Indian) music, giving juicy, full-bodied physical form to its percussive vocalizations and soaring melismas. ♦ July 24-27: At the Doris Duke, the Dutch choreographer Conny Janssen confines five men in regular-guy clothes within white padded walls, in "Rebound." From a listless, all-too-naturalistic start, the dance grows exceptionally rich, both in terms of unpredictable

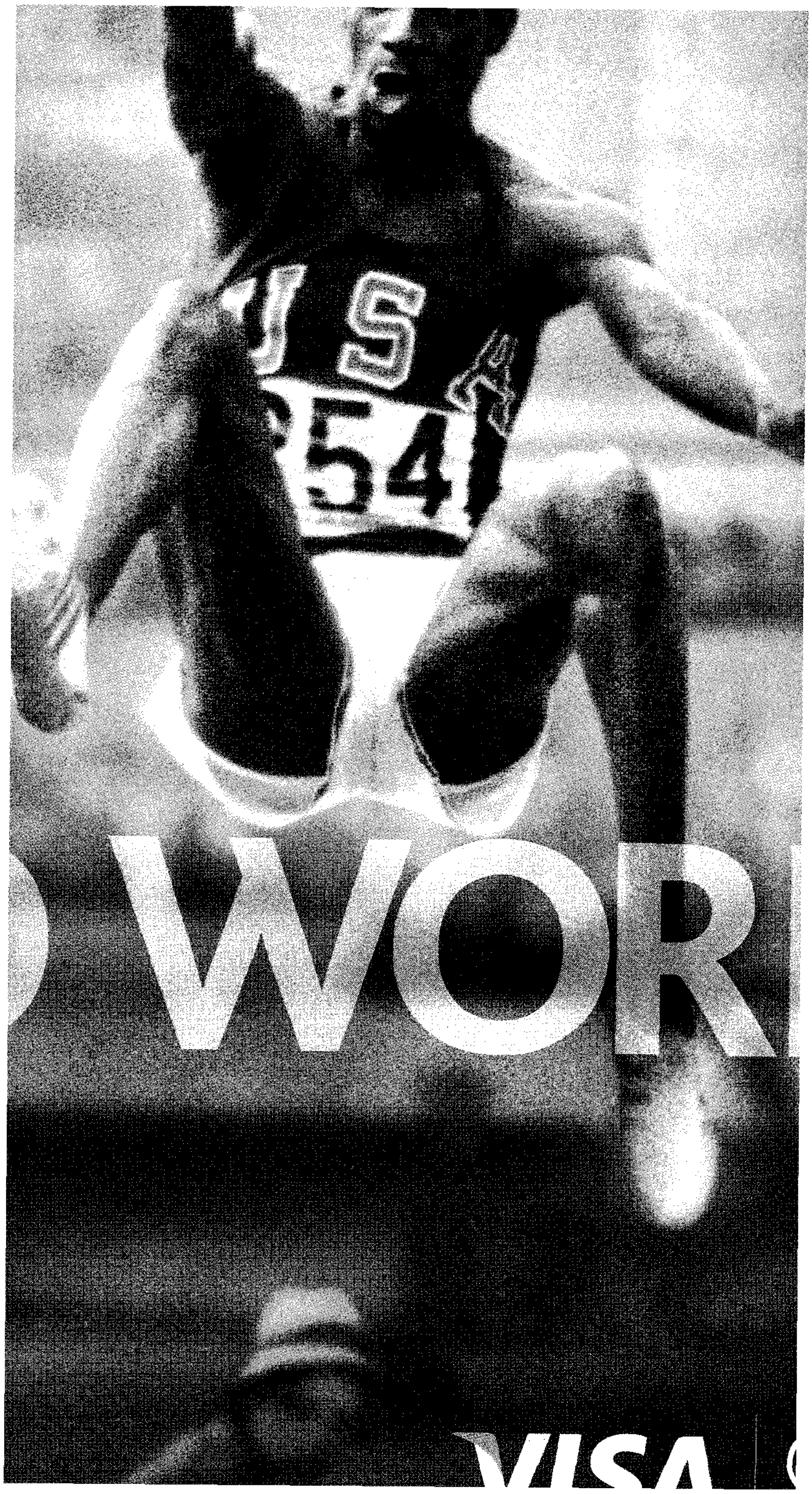
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HEAVY WEATHER



J. M. W. TURNER, "PEACE—BURIAL AT SEA" (1842), METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The huge J. M. W. Turner retrospective at the Met is no relaxing summer show. Hot and bothersome, it is a barrage of guileful effects, surveying the artist's lifelong campaign to surprise and impress—when not shocking and awing—British sensibility. Indisputably masterful, Turner invested little watercolors of quotidian subjects with tonal sparkle, and bombastic battle and disaster canvases with lyrical dash. But unlike John Constable, his quieter, more profound peer, Turner conveys only irritable ambition. We must never forget to admire him. This tires. Turner's style is synthetic, leaning on picturesque convention (never more so than when most nearly abstract) while brazening arbitrary audacities. He overlays splooshes of paint with passages of tidy drawing like bathtub decals. He did not anticipate Impressionism, which would submerge drawing in painting. William Hazlitt cited a view of his work as "pictures of nothing, and very like." Actually, it is a congeries of misty, fiery, surfy, sunset stunts—an art less to contemplate than to talk about, calculated to jazz the talkiest of nations. Turner was the Damien Hirst of his day.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*


WOR
VISA

movement and convincingly human interaction. Especially in its partnered duets, the portrait of male behavior is compelling, by turns aggressive, tender, and downright silly, as the boys run up the walls, bounce on a trampoline, and work up to a booty-slapping finale. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 24.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

CONCERTS IN TOWN

INTERNATIONAL KEYBOARD INSTITUTE AND FESTIVAL
July 23 at 8:30: The final week of the pianist Jerome Rose's annual series begins with a recital by Philippe Entremont, who won widespread renown for his recordings in the nineteen-fifties and sixties only to move on to a somewhat less distinguished career as a conductor. He returns to the keyboard to offer performances of favorite works by Mozart, Beethoven (the "Appassionata" Sonata), Debussy, and Ravel (the "Pavane," and "Alborada del Gracioso"). ♦ July 26 at 8:30: The festival's "master series" closes with a recital by the superdexterous Marc-André Hamelin, balancing elegant works by Mozart and Chopin (the Two Nocturnes, Op. 27) with clangorous sonatas by Scriabin (No. 7, "White Mass") and Ives (the "Concord"). (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. 212-580-0210, ext. 4858. For full schedule, see www.ikif.org.)

BARGEMUSIC
July 24 at 8: Bill Lee—best known, perhaps, for his scores for films by his son Spike Lee—is the star of this week's Jazz Night. ♦ July 25-26 at 8: Mark Peskanov and Doris Stevenson provide a grand tour of the Sonatas for Violin and Piano (all three) by Edvard Grieg, with a dash of Sibelius (the Five Pieces for Violin and Piano) mixed in. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
Following the pattern of recent years, Mozart will be the star around which a veritable solar system of other composers will orbit. Take the opening program, offered by Louis Langrée and the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra: Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, followed by Schoenberg's chamber-orchestra arrangement of Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde" (with the contralto Anna Larsson and the tenor Paul Groves). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. July 29-30 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL
July 23 at 11 A.M.: One of America's finest young baritones—Thomas Meglioranza, accompanied by Reiko Uchida—begins the week at Westchester's elegant festival with an intimate recital in the Rosen Estate's sumptuous Music Room. ♦ July 24 at 7:30: Frank Huang and Gilles Vonsattel, two young laureates of the Naumburg Competition, offer sonatas for violin and piano by Debussy, Enescu (the bold Sonata No. 3), and Beethoven (the "Kreutzer"). ♦ July 25 at 8: The Caramoor Virtuosi—an outstanding assemblage of young players that includes the pianist Andrew Armstrong, the violinists Jennifer and Laura Frautschi, and the cellist Edward Arron—perform chamber music by Haydn, Arensky (the plaintive Quartet for Violin, Viola, and Two Cellos), and Mozart. ♦ July 26 at 8: For Will Crutchfield, Caramoor's decisive director of opera, authoritative texts are always favored, but his performance of "La Forza del Destino" is of exceptional interest: it will use Philip Gossett's new critical edition of the leaner, meaner original version, which premièred in St. Petersburg. The cast includes such singers as Takesha Meshé Kizart, Emmanuel di Villarosa, Zurab Ninua, Kirstin Chavez, and Marco Nisticò. ♦ July 27 at 4:30: The Virtuosi return to perform a program featuring John Harbison's Piano Quintet and Dvořák's String Sextet in A Major. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
As the Music Festival of the Hamptons winds down, the flutist Marya Martin's bright month-long series comes on line. It opens with an outdoor concert on the lawn of the Bridgehampton Historical Society that will feature the "Four Seasons" concertos by both Vivaldi and Piazzolla. (July 23 at 6:30. No tickets required. For more information, call 631-537-6368.)

TANGLEWOOD FESTIVAL
July 23 at 8: In a bold—but not surprising—move, Tanglewood devotes its entire Festival of Contemporary Music to the celebration of Elliott Carter's hundredth-birthday year. One of the most important events is a concert (featuring the Cello Concerto and the "Holiday Overture") with the superb Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, fronted by two illustrious advocates for Carter's music: the conductor Oliver Knussen and the cellist Fred Sherry. ♦ July 24 at 8: The climax of the festival is an all-Carter program—the "Three Illusions," the "Boston Concerto," the "Symphonia," and the Horn Concerto (with James Sommerville)—with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the venerable Knussen and the up-and-coming Shi-Yeon Sung. (For complete schedule, see www.tanglewood.org.) ♦ July 25 at 8:30: David Zinman conducts an all-Brahms program with the B.S.O., consisting of the Third Symphony and the First Piano Concerto (with the formidable Yefim Bronfman). ♦ July 26 at 8:30: Who better than John Williams to lead the annual "Film Night at Tanglewood," a concert featuring music from Williams's latest collaboration with Steven Spielberg, "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull." ♦ July 27 at 2:30: New York's Orchestra of St. Luke's, usually found at Caramoor in the summer months, makes a guest appearance in the Berkshires; Roberto Abbado conducts music by Mendelssohn (the Violin Concerto, with Sarah Chang), Beethoven (the Symphony No. 7 in A Major), and Joan Tower. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

BARD SUMMERSCAPE: "KING ROGER"
This 1926 opera, at once sonically and intellectually sumptuous, by Karol Szymanowski—Poland's most important composer between Chopin and Lutoslawski—has long lingered on the edge of the repertory. Leon Botstein, conducting the American Symphony Orchestra, has commissioned a Polish production, directed by Lech Majewski and choreographed by Noémie Lafrance; the same forces will also offer, as a prelude to this short three-act opera, Szymanowski's "Harnasie," a folk-inspired cross between oratorio and ballet. (Fisher Center, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. July 25 at 8 and July 27 at 3. Through Aug. 3.)

ASTON MAGNA
"Russian Baroque" may sound like an oxymoron, but the Empresses Anna and Elizabeth, improving upon the example set by Peter the Great, brought a number of composers to St. Petersburg to live and work. The early-music group will be joined by members of the Clarion Music Society and their conductor, Steven Fox, in a program of operatic and instrumental works. (Olin Hall, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7425. July 25 at 8. ♦ Simon's Rock College, Great Barrington, Mass. July 26 at 5. For details, see www.astonmagna.org.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Shakespeare is all the rage at Glimmerglass this summer, with four Bard-related works performed on a single set inspired by the playwright's own Globe Theatre. July 26 at 8 and July 29 at 2: The festival introduces the last entry in its summer repertory, Anne Bogart's production of Bellini's "I Capuleti e i Montecchi," a melodious adaptation of the story that inspired Shakespeare to write "Romeo and Juliet." Sarah Coburn and Sandra Piques Eddy (en travesti) take the leading roles; David Angus conducts. ♦ July 27 at 2: The director Diane Paulus takes "Kiss Me, Kate"—Cole Porter's charmingly Runyonesque treatment of "The Taming of the Shrew"—for a spin. Lisa Vroman and Brad Little and Courtney Romano and David Larsen are the musical's two contentious couples; David Charles Abell. ♦ July 28 at 2: Glimmerglass makes history by offering the first fully staged American performances of the young Richard Wagner's second opera, "Das Liebesverbot" ("The Ban on Love"), which relocates "Measure for Measure" to Palermo; a comic opera in praise of free love, it spurns ponderous Germanic influences in favor of those of Auber and Bellini. Nicholas Muni's production sets the work in nineteen-fifties Italy; Corrado Rovaris conducts a cast that features Mark Schnaible, Claudia Waite, Richard Cox, and Holli Harrison. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
This summer series' tranquil music chapel (with world-class acoustics) hosts a stream of vibrant performances each summer. Its next offering is a touch exotic: the famed Fitzwilliam Quartet, in residence at Cambridge University, performing works by Mozart, Tchaikovsky (the String Quartet No. 2 in F Major), and the British composer Jeremy Thurlow (a world première). (Woodstock, N.Y. July 27 at 4. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

MUSIC FESTIVAL OF THE HAMPTONS
This resilient festival, going it alone again after spending a summer in league with Leon Botstein's Bard Music Festival colossus, closes its schedule with a salute to Leonard Bernstein, whose ninetieth birthday would have been celebrated this year. The classical pianist Eric Himy and the jazz pianist Eric Reed will interpret selections from the Bernstein repertoire; Jamie Bernstein will host. (Old Whalers Church, Sag Harbor, N.Y. 800-644-4418. July 27 at 8.)

MOVIES

OPENING

AMERICAN TEEN
A documentary, directed by Nanette Burstein, about five high-school seniors in Indiana. Opening July 25. (In limited release.)

BAGHEAD
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening July 25. (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

BOY A
A drama, directed by John Crowley, about a notorious twenty-four-year-old criminal (Andrew Garfield) who attempts to readjust to society after his release from jail. Opening July 23. (Film Forum.)

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening July 25. (In wide release.)

BUSTIN' DOWN THE DOOR
A documentary about six star surfers' breakthroughs, in 1975. Directed by Jeremy Gosch. Opening July 25. (Village East Cinemas.)

CSNY: DÉJÀ VU
Neil Young directed this documentary, about a 2006 reunion tour by the band Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Opening July 25. (Sunshine Cinema.)

MAN ON WIRE
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening July 25. (Lincoln Plaza Cinema and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE ORDER OF MYTHS
A documentary about the two Mardi Gras celebrations in Mobile, Alabama, which are still segregated by race; directed by Margaret Brown. Opening July 25. (IFC Center.)

STEP BROTHERS
Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly star in this comedy, directed by Adam McKay and co-produced by Judd Apatow, about two floundering middle-aged men who become stepbrothers when their parents marry. Opening July 25. (In wide release.)

THE X-FILES: I WANT TO BELIEVE
David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson star in this science-fiction drama, directed by Chris Carter. Opening July 25. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BAGHEAD
This resolutely scruffy horror-romance by the Duplass brothers, Jay and Mark—the first genre film

by members of the so-called "mumblecore" band of independent filmmakers—is short on dramatic values but long on conceptual smarts. The story concerns four struggling young actors in Los Angeles, two men and two women, who hole up in a rural cabin to write a film. Though planning to make a love story based on their own romantic tribulations, they switch to a horror movie after one of the women recounts a nightmare she had—and, suddenly, real-life horrors begin to impinge on their idyll. Much of the dialogue is improvised and the action unfolds loosely, but the Duplass brothers, who do the camera and sound work themselves, are canny about the personal significance of their casual means of production: the film's outsider-artists are modelled on themselves and their friends, and their methods are one with their milieu. The shaky camera wearies the eye but beguiles the mind, as if the filmmakers, aping the style of home movies, were also borrowing their function and fabricating sweet memories before our eyes, indulging in nostalgia for the present. The plot-driven horror-movie framework sometimes stifles the freewheeling quartet of actors (the hyperarticulate Greta Gerwig seems particularly muted) but they nonetheless conjure a sweet, low-key intimacy to balance the project's whiz-bang ingenuity.—*Richard Brody* (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

Nanette Burstein directed "American Teen," opening July 25.

AKIKO KATO

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

This episodic period drama, based on the 1945 novel by Evelyn Waugh, is centered on Charles Ryder (Matthew Goode), a soldier in the Second World War, as he looks back on his life. The story starts with him as a young artist at Oxford in the nineteen-twenties; there, he falls in love with the flamboyantly profligate life style of a pair of siblings, the aristocratic Sebastian (Ben Whishaw) and his beautiful sister, Julia (Hayley Atwell). Charles spends some time at Brideshead, their spectacular estate, where their staunchly Catholic mother (Emma Thompson) marches around in dour frocks ordering everyone to chapel, and attempts to dissuade her beloved Sebastian from following his homosexual tendencies. The screenwriters, Andrew Davies and Jeremy Brock, took many liberties with the book, altering not only plot points but also the main thrust of Charles's spiritual journey: instead of turning from an agnostic into a Catholic, he starts out an atheist and, seemingly, remains one. This change lends nothing to the film, a torpid version of a classic that is ultimately and unjustly devoid of passion. Directed by Julian Jarrold.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

THE DARK KNIGHT

The last Batman movie was grim and methodical; this one, also directed by Christopher Nolan, is grim and incoherent, with a thudding soundtrack, fights shot from too close a distance to see anything, multiple events clanging together like discordant bells, and freaky sadism and menace. Christian Bale is the placid Bruce Wayne, a swank gent in Armani suits. As Batman, he has greater urgency, but he delivers his lines in a hoarse voice with an unvarying inflection. He's no match for the great Heath Ledger as his nemesis, the Joker. Ledger, in a fright wig and gobs of white makeup, shambles and slides into a room, bending his knees and twisting his neck and suddenly surging right into someone's face like a deep-sea creature coming up for air. He's thoroughly terrifying (do not, despite the PG-13 rating, bring little children), and, as you're watching him, you can't help wondering how badly he messed himself up in order to play the role this way. "The Dark Knight" has been made in a time of terror, but it's not fighting terror, it's embracing and unleashing it—while making sure, with proper calculation, to set up the next installment of the corporate franchise. With Gary Oldman, Aaron Eckhart, and Maggie Gyllenhaal.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/21/08.) (In wide release.)

GET SMART

This good-natured but bland reprise of the sixties TV classic offers a few laughs but little delight. As the bumbling top-secret Agent 86, Steve Carell delivers his droll dialogue with style, but he's no physical comedian; Anne Hathaway, a radiant romantic actress pressed into duty as his ultra-competent partner, Agent 99, is no comedian at all, though she brings the brief moments of manufactured pathos fully to life. There are some well-conceived gags and, as in the series, lots of funny gadgets, but the plot has been ramped up into a noisy and pointless action spectacle, full of generic C.G.I. The best scene is a high-stakes dance-off that is, alas, edited to death, leaving the impression that few of the actors know how to dance. A climactic wink at Hitchcock's "The Man Who Knew Too Much" does this time-filler no favors.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

HANCOCK

Will Smith's lonely, alcoholic superhero—a nihilist slob who can't fly anywhere in Los Angeles without making a mess—is hated by everybody. The public curses him, and even the Dickensian TV lawyer Nancy Grace—of the curling lip and ferocious eye—gets on his case. A good-hearted P.R. man, Ray (Jason Bateman), tries to do something for Hancock's image. But then Ray introduces Hancock to his wife, Mary (Charlize Theron), and this inventive summer spectacle adds sexual tension and emotional power to its visual gags. For the first time in his life, Will Smith doesn't smile and tease and drawl; he stays in character as a self-hating lonely guy, and Theron, no longer covering her beauty, looks at him with an uncanny mixture of attraction and alarm. The movie takes surprising turns and is unexpectedly affecting. Written by Vy Vincent Ngo and Vince Gilligan and directed by Peter Berg.—*D.D.* (7/7 & 14/08) (In wide release.)

HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY

The fabulist director Guillermo del Toro gets a hefty budget to continue his comic-book franchise with this action-packed fantasy about a heroic demon (Ron Perlman) and his fellow beasties (Selma Blair, Doug Jones). This time, his team is joined by an ectoplasmic force (voiced by Seth MacFarlane with a Colonel Klink-like accent) that can animate inanimate objects. It's that kind of movie. The plot is thin, involving some hooey about the denizens of a hidden underground world who are out to destroy humanity. And, while Hellboy and his friends set out to save the day, intriguing story lines are brought up and then dropped (in all likelihood they will be picked up in a third installment). This film is happy to coast on its good humor and brilliant action pieces. Fair enough, since del Toro has taken the poetry of some of his best work and butched it up, creating some of the most amazing-looking creatures and battles of his career. It's eye candy for the "Creature Features" set.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

I, PIERRE RIVIÈRE, HAVING SLAUGHTERED MY MOTHER, MY SISTER, AND MY BROTHER . . .

If Robert Bresson had been a Marxist, he might have made something like this meticulous, ecstatic historical reconstruction of an 1835 murder case in rural Normandy. Working with a script based on documents edited by the philosopher Michel Foucault, including medical and judicial records as well as the killer's own memoir, the director, René Allio, went on location and recruited local nonactors to fill out the large cast of characters. The story is structured as a mystery, as the film begins at the crime scene and flashes back and forth to explain the strange, disturbing events that led up to it. Rivière, a young misfit, claims to have acted under orders from God but actually sought to avenge his father's persecution at the hands of his mother, who, in her obsessive attachment to her family's farmstead and resentment of her mother-in-law's authority, bled her husband dry financially while dallying with other men. A memorable villainess, Madame Rivière, played furiously by Jacqueline Millière, is a force of nature, and Pierre, a frustrated thinker constrained by his social status, is hauntingly portrayed by Claude Hébert, who draws out the stifled brilliance under the torment. With his efficient, clever, and disciplined methods, Allio brings to life hidden inner worlds, revealing the post-medieval brutality perched on the edge of administrative and scientific modernity. In French. Released in 1976.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; July 25-31.)

MAN ON WIRE

In 1974, Philippe Petit, the poet of the high wire, snuck his merry men into one of the towers of the World Trade Center, strung a cable across to its sister building, and performed an above-the-clouds ballet that has never been equalled. This documentary, written and directed by James Marsh, takes the archival footage of that event and, along with new interviews from the participants as well as staged reconstructions, weaves an exciting tale that plays like a heist film. The story of how and why Petit accomplished this astonishing feat is thrilling, and the charismatic Frenchman was made for the camera. He's graceful, articulate, and endearing, much like the film itself.—*B.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinema and Sunshine Cinema.)

MEET DAVE

This peculiarly misconceived comedy stars Eddie Murphy in a dual role, as Dave, a humanoid spaceship that lands on Earth in order to move unnoticed among earthlings, and as the tiny outer-space homunculus who is its captain. The technologically advanced intergalactic travellers are on a mission to drain the oceans dry and recover the salt for use back home as fuel, but the device that would enable them to do so has fallen into the hands of Josh (Austyn Lynd Myers), an

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BLACK AND WHITE

Among the many great innovations of the 1968 Broadway hit "Hair" (now in revival at the Delacorte)—noise as music, color-blind casting—perhaps none was more titillating, and incendiary, than the show's interest in miscegenation. In the musical, a black dude named Hud—part of the tribe of hippies who hang out in Washington Square Park—has fathered a baby with a white woman. But no one talks about it beyond intimations in the trifle song "I'm Black." It's an odd, muted moment in a show that is about, among other things, the therapeutic power of not having any hangups, and of talking about nearly everything. A chorus of black and white girls are "Hair" 's true furies. With the songs "Black Boys" and "White Boys," paeans to the beauty of the opposite race, audiences were stunned into acknowledging their taboos—and their blind lust. It's fun to hear Oscar winner Diane Keaton, on the original-cast album, as one of the white girls celebrating the glories of dark-skinned brothers—Annie Hall in an appropriately diversified world.

—Hilton Als

SEAN McCABE

ordinary New York fifth-grader who lives with his widowed mother (Elizabeth Banks), and Dave must make nice in order to get the gizmo back. As an alien robot attempting to master the ways of New Yorkers, Murphy is expectably uproarious, but more than half of his screen time is given over to his straight-man role as the captain, who, along with the rest of his crew, undergoes an emotional awakening upon contact with the joyful irrationality of life on earth. The sentimental strain is both unconvincing and ungrounded, but in the all-too-rare moments when Murphy, who invests with psychodrama the role of a misfit learning manners, lets himself go the movie comes brilliantly to life.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

TELL NO ONE
The young director and actor Guillaume Canet, working with the screenwriter Philippe Lefebvre, has taken Harlan Coben's American mystery novel from 2001 and set it in the realistic social and working world of Paris and its environs, where good-looking, intelligent, and articulate people find one another interesting. François Cluzet dominates the movie as a pediatrician whose wife was murdered eight years previously. When messages show up on his computer suggesting that she may still be alive, he's amazed, and tries to reach her, only to run into the police and half the criminal underworld of Paris. Bounced back and forth among murderers and psychopaths, he has some remarkable adventures and learns about the past in tiny increments. We're meant to be a little lost, too—tantalized by hints and echoes. Underneath all the mysteries, however, there are some powerful forces at work, including the love of parents for children (one of whom is played by Canet himself). With Kristin Scott Thomas, Andre Dussollier, and Jean Rochefort. In French.—*D.D.* (7/7 & 14/08) (In wide release.)

THE WACKNESS
Ben Kingsley strains for his Alan Arkin moment in this pseudo-edgy, Manhattan-centric comic drama in the vein of "Little Miss Sunshine," set in 1994 in the age of Giuliani (whose name crops up repeatedly as a symbol of all the repressed grunginess of yore). The young director Jonathan Levine draws on the romantic frustrations of his own high-school years to tell the sincere and mawkish yet loopy story of Luke Shapiro (Josh Peck), who graduates from a private school on the Upper East Side with low grades and a high-profit job as a marijuana dealer, peddling his wares from a pushcart labelled "Ices." When Luke is down in the dumps he sees a psychiatrist, Dr. Jeffrey Squires (Kingsley), whom he pays in dime or quarter bags—and who is the stepfather of Luke's object of affection, Stephanie (Olivia Thirlby). The burgeoning romance is sweet and plausible, if utterly conventional, but Kingsley's weird-old-man routine, played out in the shrink's growing bond with the smart yet naïve young slacker, is fake and vain, a shameless play for an Oscar nod. This Sundance prize-winner, made on the cheap, is as formulaic and calculated as the most banal big-studio productions. With Famke Janssen, Method Man, and, for no reason at all, Mary-Kate Olsen.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

WALL-E
It has the waggish adorableness and the tripping-and-falling roughhouse of other animated films, but it's also a work of tragic nostalgia. In the first half, WALL-E, a robotic trash collector and compactor, continues to go about his duties after the human presence has been blown away from Earth by billowing waves of noxious dust. He trolls among the detritus of the vanished culture, fetishizing such junk items as plastic forks, hubcaps, and a tape of the lumbering musical "Hello, Dolly!," which provides him with models of human connection and such oddities as singing and dancing. A robot named EVE—she looks like a hovering white plastic egg designed by Steve Jobs's gang in Cupertino—lands on Earth; he woos her, and then accompanies her to a space station called the Axiom, where, it turns out, the remaining humans have been living for seven hundred years in a totalitarian pleasure garden run by a giant big-box-store company. "WALL-E" blends two kinds of science fiction—the postapocalyptic disaster movie and the dystopian fantasy derived from Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," in which people are controlled not by coercion but by pleasure. It's also a satire on the engulfing tendencies of consumer capitalism. From the Pixar division of Disney. Directed by Andrew Stanton.—*D.D.* (7/21/08) (In wide release.)

WANTED
After "Night Watch" and "Day Watch," two of the most successful—and certainly the loudest—Russian films ever made, the director Timur Bekmambetov has turned his hungry eyes on the United States. The result is this furious and fantastical piece of junk, which, though nominally set in some town called "Chicago," could take place almost anywhere with roads. The plot entails yet another revenge of the nerd: an accountant (James McAvoy) who follows in the footsteps of his father and becomes a dexterous assassin. He is trained in this delicate art by Sloan (Morgan Freeman), Fox (Angelina Jolie), and a bunch of other killers who have the best interests of the world at heart and, one hopes, their tongues firmly stapled to their cheeks. The outcome should be playful and zippy, and some of the chase sequences, to be fair, are enjoyably shameless in their rush to excess; but the film as a whole feels much nastier than it needs to be, abounding in details of damaged flesh, and it leaves a sour taste.—*Anthony Lane* (6/30/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

A MAN NAMED PEARL: Angelika Film Center. **FELON:** Sunshine Cinema. **TRANSSIBERIAN:** In wide release.

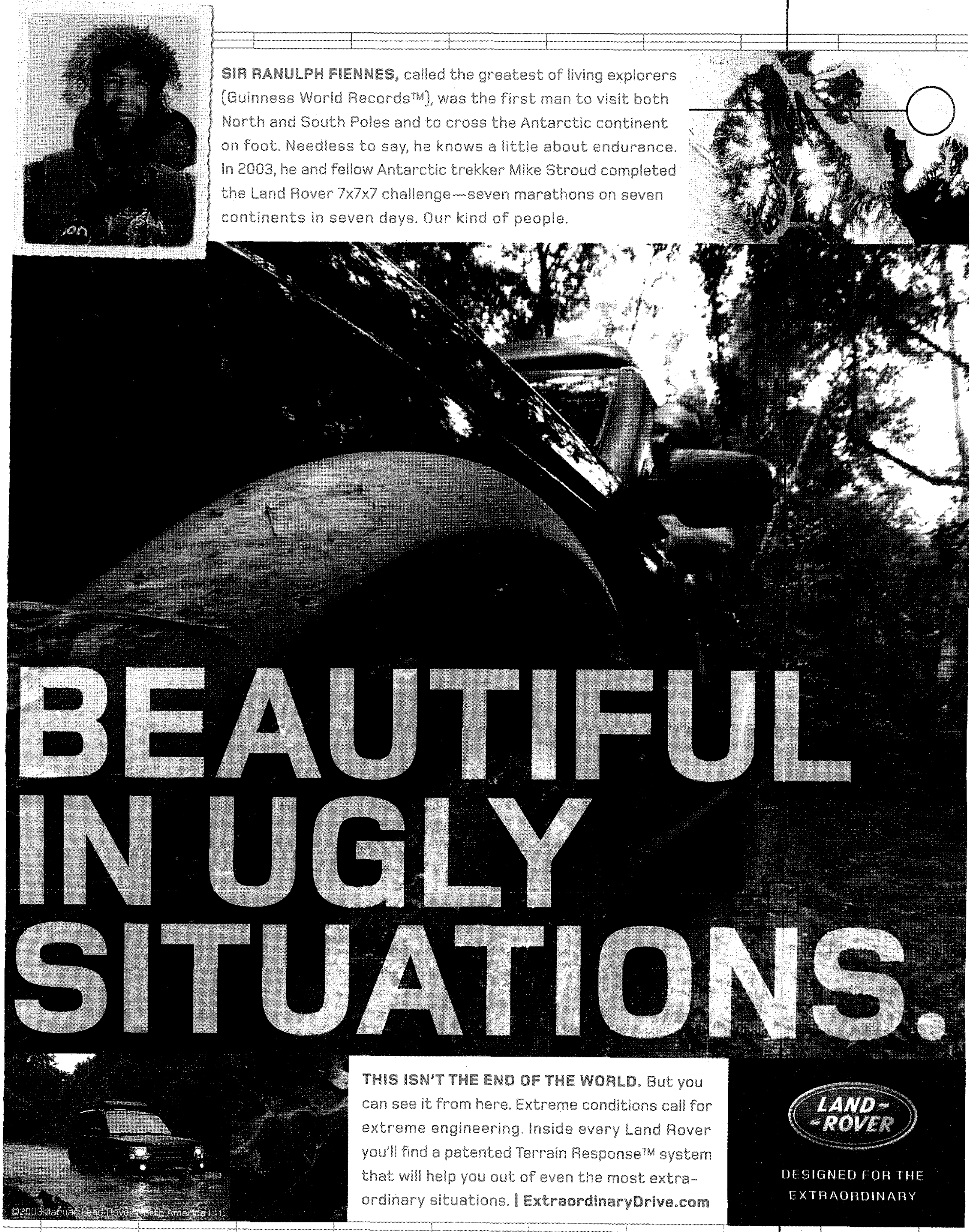
REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. July 25-29 at 7 and July 30-31 at 9:15: "Back to Normandy" (2007, Nicolas Philibert; in French). ♦ July 25 and July 28-29 at 9:15, July 26-27 at 4:30 and 9:15, and July 30-31 at 6:45: "I, Pierre Rivière, Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother . . ." (†). ♦ "Delineating Borders: The Films of Jesse Lerner." All films are in Spanish unless otherwise noted. July 25 at 7:30: "Frontierland" (1995; in English and Spanish). ♦ July 26 at 7:30: "Ruins" (1998; in English and Spanish). ♦ July 27 at 7:30: "The American Egypt" (2001), "Magnavoz" (2006), and "T.S.H." (2004). ♦ "Essential Cinema." July 26 at 5:30: Short films by Ron Rice, Hans Richter, and Paul Sharits. ♦ July 27 at 5: "Triumph of the Will" (1934-35, Leni Riefenstahl; in German).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"All the Real Americans: The World of David Gordon Green." July 23 at 6:50: "The Gravy Train" (1974, Jack Starrett). ♦ July 23 at 9:15: "Tango and Cash" (1989, Andrei Konchalovsky and Albert Magnoli). ♦ July 24 at 7:30: "Pineapple Express" (2008, David Gordon Green), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ "Four from Robert Hamer." July 28 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Scapegoat" (1959). ♦ July 29 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Kind Hearts and Coronets" (1949). ♦ July 30 at 6:50 and 9:30: "Father Brown" (1954). ♦ July 31 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "It Always Rains on Sunday" (1947).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Aug. 7: "The Human Condition" (1959-1961, Masaki Kobayashi), in three parts. All films are in Japanese. July 23 at 2 and 7; July 25 at noon, 4, and 8:10; July 27 at noon; and July 30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at 2 and 7:30: Part One, "No Greater Love." ♦ July 24 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20; July 26 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20; July 27 at 4; and July 29 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: Part Two, "Road to Eternity." ♦ July 27 at 7:40: Part Three, "A Soldier's Prayer."

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. July 25-26 at 11 A.M.: "Virgin Spring" (1960, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." July 25-26: "Wild in the Streets" (1968, Barry Shear).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." July 23-25 at 1:30: "The Big Trail" (1930, Raoul Walsh). ♦ "Zeitgeist: The Films of Our Time." All films are in French. July 23 at 5:30: "See the Sea" (1997, François Ozon) and "A Summer Dress" (1996, Ozon). ♦ July 23 at 8: "Into Great Silence" (2006, Philip Gröning). ♦ "Salvador Dalí and Three American Surrealists." July 23 at 6 and July 26 at 2: "Fantasia" (1940, produced by Walt Disney) and "Skeleton Dance" (1929, Disney). ♦ July 23 at 8:30 and July 26 at 4:30: "Animal Crackers" (1930, Victor Heerman). ♦ July 24 at 6 and July 26 at 6:30: "Monkey Business" (1931, Norman McLeod). ♦ July 24 at 8 and July 30 at 6: "A Day at the Races" (1937, Sam Wood). ♦ July 25 at 5:30 and July 27 at 6:15: "The Ten Commandments" (1923, Cecil B. De Mille; silent). ♦ July 25 at 8:30 and July 31 at 6: "The Sign of the Cross" (1933, De Mille). ♦ July 26 at 8:15 and July 28 at 6: "Cleopatra" (1934, De Mille). ♦ July 27 at 2 and July 28 at 8: "The Ten Commandments" (1956, De Mille). ♦ "Première Brazil." All films are in Portuguese. July 25 at 6: "Pindorama: The True Story of the Seven Dwarves" (2007, Roberto Berliner). ♦ July 26 at 2:30: "Estômago: A Gastronomic Story" (2007, Marcos Jorge). ♦ July 26 at 5 and July 28 at 6: "The Man Who Bottled Clouds" (2008, Lirio Ferreira). ♦ July 26 at 8: "The Mystery of Samba" (2008, Carolina Jabor).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." July 25 at 9:30: "Heaven Can Wait" (1943, Ernst Lubitsch).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screenings. July 28 at 6:30: "Fields of Fuel" (2008, Josh Tickell). ♦ "Dominique Delouche: Ballet Cineaste." Except where noted, all films are in French. July 23 at 2 and July 24 at 8:30: "Markova, the Legend" (2001). ♦ July 26 at 1:45 and July 27 at 6:15: "Maïa" (1999). ♦ July 26 at 4 and July 27 at 8:15: "Katia et Volodia" (1988). ♦ July 26 at 6 and July 27 at 2: "Violette et Mr. B" (2001). ♦ July 26 at 8:30 and July 27 at 4: "Nights of Cabiria" (1957, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

READINGS AND TALKS

"WORD FOR WORD"
Bryant Park's reading series continues on July 23 at 12:30 with Joyce Carol Oates, who will discuss her latest novel, "My Sister, My Love: The Intimate Story of Skyler Rampike," which is about a case much like the JonBenet Ramsay murder. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-768-4242.)

BOOKCOURT
James Frey reads from his new novel, "Bright Shiny Morning." (163 Court St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. July 24 at 7.)

SOLAS
Earlier this year, St. Mark's Bookshop started hosting a reading series at this nearby watering hole. On July 24 at 7:30, it presents Gary Indiana, who will read from his fiction. (232 E. 9th St. No tickets necessary.)

THE DELANCEY
In 2003, the Chicago design firm Coudal Partners began commissioning writers, artists, comedians, and the like to explore how place influences the experience of reading a book, and vice versa. It published the resulting work on a Web site, and it recently collected it for the new anthology "Field-Tested Books." On July 28 at 7, the writer Randy Cohen, the designer Steven Heller, the *New Yorker* editor Ben Greenman, and other contributors read from the book on the rooftop of this Lower East Side bar. (168 Delancey St. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

MID-SUMMER POW WOW
The Queens County Farm Museum, a little patch of working green in the big metropolis, presents its twenty-ninth annual Thunderbird American Indian Mid-Summer Pow Wow. More than forty Indian nations are involved in the event, which features chanting, drumming, and dance contests. (For more information, call 718-347-3276. July 25-27.)

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Classic Japanese films, at Walter Reade.

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
FAN CLUB
July 30-Aug. 14

Starting in the nineteen-thirties, Kashiko Kawakita (who died in 1993) advanced Japanese cinema by importing world cinema masterworks to Japan, discovering great Japanese films and supporting their release, and arranging financing for emerging directors. Walter Reade offers a tribute to her with screenings of Japanese classics, including Akira Kurosawa's "Ikiru" and Seijun Suzuki's "Tokyo Drifter." (212-875-5600.)

TARA HARDY

ART
THE BORROWERS
July 30-Nov. 10

Pablo Picasso's Cubist collage "Pipe, Glass, and Bottle of Rum" will lend its title to a show at MOMA about appropriation. Some hundred works from the museum's collection will look at artists' embrace of popular culture through the use of copying and quotation. (212-708-9400.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
EAST IS EAST
Aug. 8-10, Aug. 15-17

The music of Sergei Prokofiev—even more than that of his colleague Dmitri Shostakovich—was a forum in which the artistic and political conflicts between Soviet Russia and the West were ruthlessly played out. This summer's Bard Music Festival reassesses his career with a generous selection of concerts and symposia. (845-758-7900.)

NIGHT LIFE
IT TAKES TWO
Aug. 15

Gustavo Santaolalla, an Argentinean composer who is based in Los Angeles and who has won Oscars for his scores to "Brokeback Mountain" and "Babel," comes to the city with his South American ensemble, Bajofondo, which mixes tango and other native genres with electronica, trip-hop, and rock. (www.summerstage.org.)

THE THEATRE
THE BEST OF TIMES
Aug. 19

Jill Santoriello, a newcomer to Broadway, wrote the book, music, and lyrics for a musical adaptation of Dickens's "A Tale of Two Cities." Warren Carlyle, a veteran choreographer, directs, at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre. (212-239-6200.)

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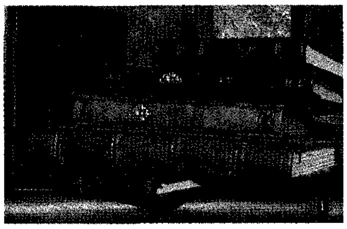

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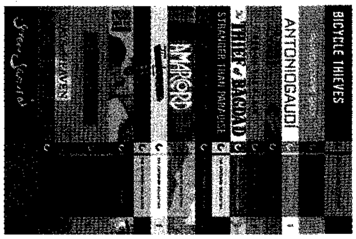

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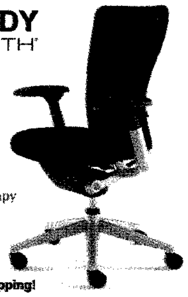

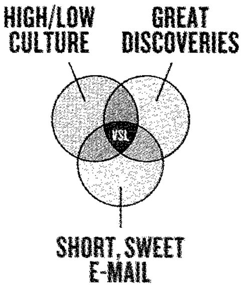

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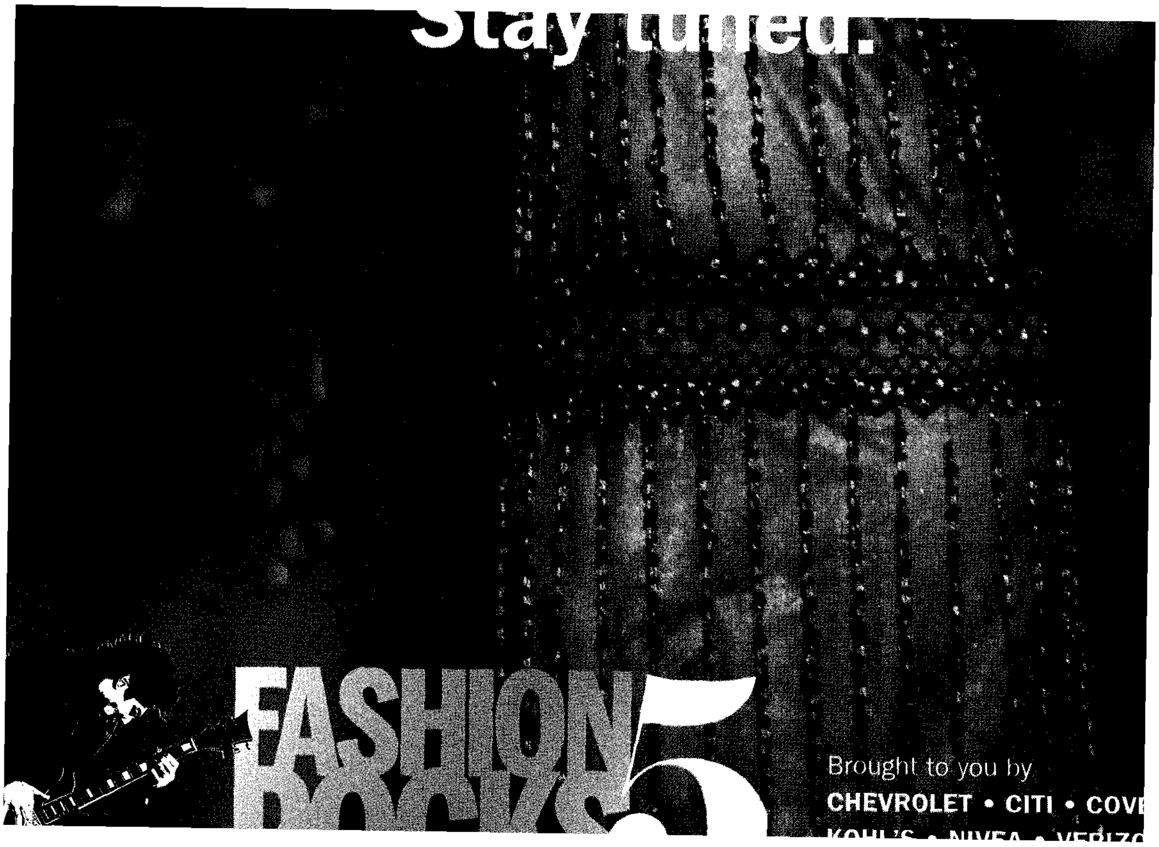
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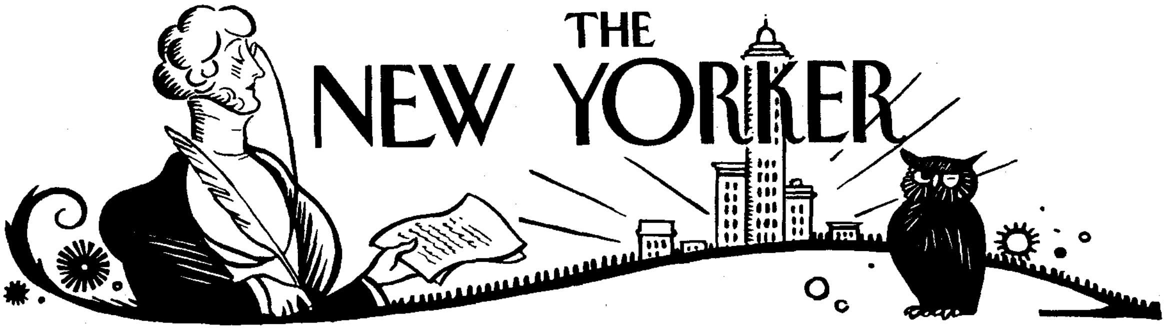
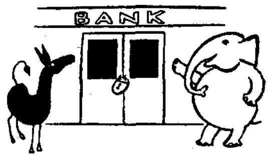


THE TALK OF THE TOWN

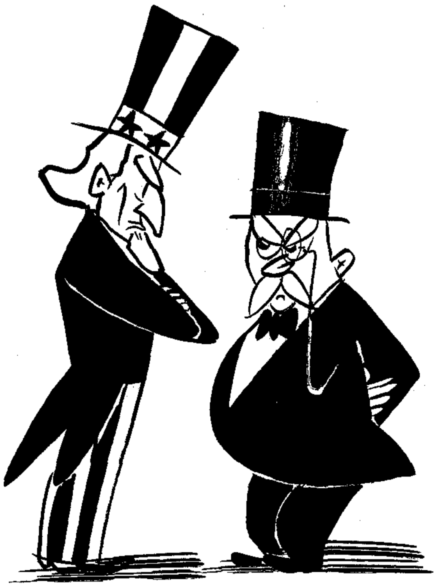
COMMENT
LOAN RANGERS



Just before the start of last week's All-Star Game, Jim Bunning, a Major League Hall of Fame pitcher and, for the past decade, Kentucky's junior Republican senator, served up a high inside fastball to Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, who was on Capitol Hill defending the Bush Administration's latest effort to bolster the ailing financial system. Cutting Paulson off in mid-sentence, Bunning said, in effect, Mr. Secretary, come next January, you will be gone, but some of us will still be here, and we will have to pick up your tab. I, for one, am not willing to give the federal government a blank check.

Bunning was objecting to Paulson's proposal that Congress empower the Treasury Department to lend an unspecified, but presumably vast, sum of taxpayers' money to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the two troubled mortgage lenders. Bunning's financial logic was questionable—given that the lenders own or guarantee mortgages worth about five trillion dollars, letting them go under is not an option—but his political point wasn't. Policymakers now face a series of decisions that will determine not merely the fate of this particular cycle but the nature of the federal government's role in the economy for the next generation.

In a political system as balkanized as ours, it is only in moments of genuine danger that meaningful reforms get enacted. The economic malaise of the nineteen-seventies facilitated the Reagan revolution. The budget crisis of the late nineteen-eighties persuaded first George H. W. Bush and then Bill Clinton to adopt some fiscal discipline, and Congress to go along with them. In some ways, the current situation is more alarming than either of those, but, so far, neither of the Presidential nominees has taken up the call for appropriately bold measures. The best that can be said of John McCain's economic plan is that it remains a work in progress. Barack Obama has advocated a second stimulus package, together with more aid for struggling homeowners, but the rest of his program was largely put together before the current downturn began.



When the subprime squall swept through Wall Street, last summer, many described it as a "liquidity crisis," by which they basically meant that, although lenders and investors were too traumatized to put their money at risk, the financial system remained fundamentally sound. Today, we are facing something far more serious: a crisis of solvency. Having lent trillions of dollars to homeowners, developers, and condo-flippers who were busy inflating the largest housing bubble in recent American history, many financial institutions are saddled with huge bad debts. The I.M.F. has called the mortgage imbroglio "the biggest financial crisis in the United States since the Great Depression." Moreover, the banks' growing reluctance to extend more credit to their remaining customers risks making the situation even worse. Such downward spirals are what turn slumps into depressions.

The government's response has been to lend to the banks—openly through the Federal Reserve, indirectly through the Federal Home Loan Banks. But lending is only a temporary solution; unless the housing market improves, more drastic measures will be needed. Specifically, the federal government may have to take over the loan books of many stricken institutions, separate the good debts from the bad, sell off the latter to bottom-feeding investors, and recapitalize the businesses that remain so that

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

they can go out and resume lending.

This is essentially what the Resolution Trust Corporation did with hundreds of insolvent savings and loans from 1989 through the early nineties—and this crisis will potentially dwarf that one. It is also what the governments of Norway and Sweden did with many of their biggest banks—which were failing after financing real-estate booms—and shortly afterward those economies were again growing vigorously. (Japan, which was caught in a similar bind, waited a number of years before it finally recapitalized its financial sector at public expense, and it suffered more than a decade of economic stagnation in consequence.)

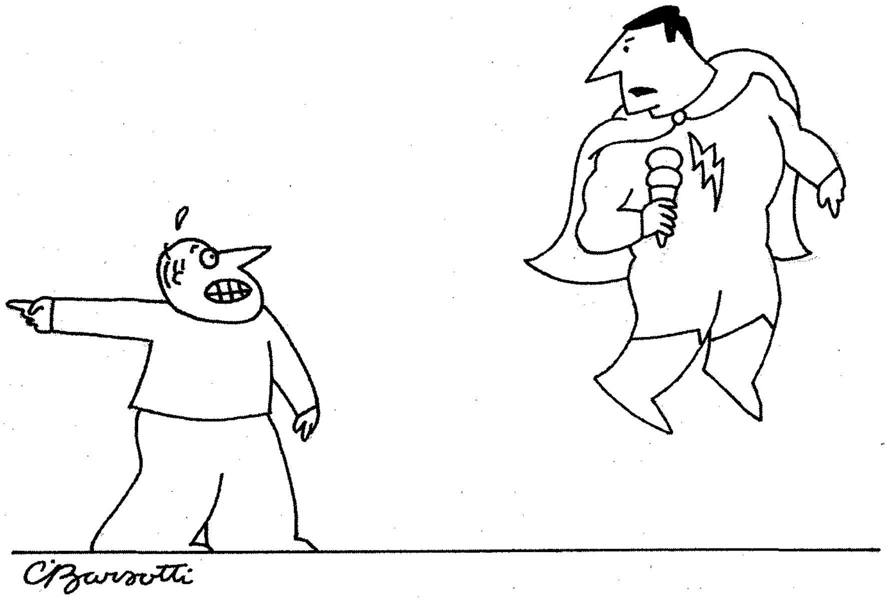
All of that comes under the heading of crisis management. To insure that we don't go through the same thing in the next economic upswing, Washington will have to enact a complete regulatory overhaul. For some twenty years, politicians of both parties have been using free-market rhetoric as a cover for favors to big campaign contributors. Starting in the Reagan Administration and culminating in the second Clinton Administration, Congress did away with many of the restrictions on the financial sector that had been in place since the nineteen-thirties, such as a ban on the merging of banks and brokerages. In recent years, predatory lending has gone unchecked, and, with little or no oversight, Wall Street banks bundled subprime home loans into complicated and ultimately toxic securities.

Effective financial regulation often involves limiting the opportunities for short-term profit in the interests of long-term stability. It may be asking too much of McCain, an ardent free marketer and onetime friend of Charles Keating, Jr., the disgraced S. & L. baron—Keating contributed to McCain's campaigns and flew him around on his private jet (McCain later reimbursed him for the trips)—to crack down on the "malefactors of wealth," although his recent invocations of Theodore Roosevelt suggest that he at least knows the origin of the term. Obama, perhaps, is a more hopeful case.

Seventy-six years ago, with the country facing the greatest economic calamity of the century, another moderately inclined Democrat saw the need for new thinking and the possibility of radical change. F.D.R.'s "brain trust" provided the intellectual framework for his New Deal speech at the 1932 Convention and for many of the policies that he enacted in his first term—policies that eased the financial crisis, expanded poverty relief, and created a modern regulatory system. The situation today is less extreme, but families face eviction from their homes; workers are losing their jobs; and last week saw long lines of anxious Californians waiting to get their money out of the failed bank IndyMac.

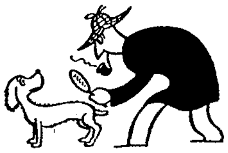
Although Obama has talked about the need for more effective regulation, he hasn't yet provided many details, and, unlike the two Roosevelts, he has been somewhat reluctant to couple his proposals with a populist critique of American capitalism. During the primary campaign, he won support by making the case that the political system, having been captured by special interests, ignores the welfare of ordinary people. Putting together a similar indictment of the financial system seems like a logical next step, and it would help Obama build a mandate for the reforms that he has proposed, such as expanding health-care coverage, reversing the Bush tax cuts, and investing in alternative energy. Adding to that a coherent plan to deal with the banking crisis and restore the government's proper role as overseer of the economy wouldn't amount to a new New Deal, but it would be a good start.

—John Cassidy



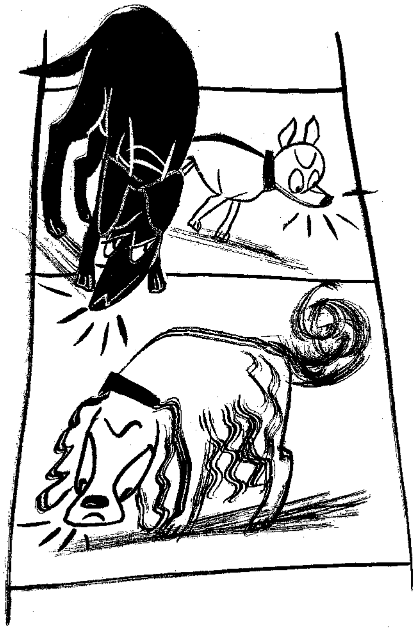
"You people are so crazy about Batman—ask him."

MAN'S BEST FRIEND DEPT.
SCOOPED



Michael Brandow, a freelance dog-walker in the Village, hadn't had much luck interesting publishers in a nonfiction manuscript that he'd been working on for the past eight years. In 2006, in the course of his research, he called Alan Beck, a professor of animal ecology at Purdue. Beck happens to edit a line of books about the bond between humans and animals for P.U. Press, and he told Brandow that he'd give the manuscript a look. "I read it and thought, This is a really neat book," Beck said recently. "So I wrote to our publisher and said, 'Over the years, I've given you a lot of shit, but this is a good one.' " The result is a three-hundred-and-thirty-nine-page social history entitled "New York's Poop Scoop Law: Dogs, the Dirt, and Due Process." Its bibliography cites, among others, Caro; Scorsese; *Dog Run: A Publication of the Washington Square Dog Run Association*; and Glickman, L. T., Shofer, F. S., "Zoonotic Visceral and Ocular Larva Migrans," *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January, 1987. Brandow has dedicated the book to "My sweet Samantha," his shepherd-chow-beagle bitch.

"Dogs, the Dirt, and Due Process" comes out on August 1st, the thirtieth anniversary (a hundred and thirtieth or so, in dog years) of Section 1310 of the New York State Public Health Law, which formally decrees, "It shall be the duty of each dog owner . . . to remove any feces left by his dog on any sidewalk, gutter, street, or other public area," and which, informally, accounts for the abundance of tightly knotted Gristedes bags in local trash cans. (Pre-1310, the largely ignored "curbing" rule held that animals were supposed to go in the gutter.) Brandow, on the phone the other day from Montreal, where he is spending the summer, admitted that "a lot of people just rolled their eyes" at the mention of his subject, but he sees the law, and the "civil war" that surrounded its adoption, as an urban parable. Notwithstanding a few groaners ("Tension filled the air like the smell of feces that radiated from the pavement," "The number one complaint was number two"), the story—which begins in Nutley, New Jersey, in 1971 (some citizens band together against a neighborhood Great Dane), crosses the Hudson (a hundred and twenty-five tons of dog shit *a day* clotting the sidewalks of "Dung City"!), skips to Albany (Koch kicks the issue upstate after the City Council fails to take action), and culminates in New York's becoming the first big city to force owners to clean up after their dogs—makes a fine Empire State procedural.



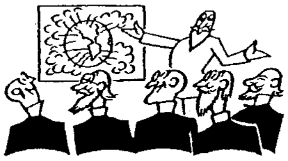
There was the usual bureaucratic gridlock: Koch inherited the problem from Beame, who inherited it from Lindsay, a waffler on canine concerns, according to Brandow, whose "known pet affiliations were minimal." Tin-eared functionaries, too: "You got *five* cats? And a *dog*?" one city official asked a woman at a hearing. "Christ. What you need is a good man." Then you had your community activists—Max Schnapp, of POPA (Pet Owners Protective Association), a labor organizer and the owner of two Great Danes (Tiger and Sampson), a pet crow (Mitzvah), three rabbits (Pinkie, Dutchie, unnamed), a white mouse (Piggy), a baby squirrel (Elmer Wiggley), a gerbil, and half a dozen alley cats (Mau Mau, Nebisch, Sister, Freddy the Freeloader, Monty Wooley), vs. Fran Lee, the founder of Children Before Dogs—grinding out their small-bore issues on the grand stage. "It was an amazing time," Beck, who was the director of the Bureau of Animal Affairs for the city from 1975 to 1980, recalled. "I was actually caught in the crossfire when dog feces were being thrown back and forth." (Gross but true: Lee, at a public debate, got smacked in the head by a loaded baggie.)

For the book, Beck was happy to share his collection of memorabilia, including various cleanup devices, some of which, Brandow writes, were modelled on fruit pickers. "The drawings, they're like looking at eighteenth-century flying contraptions or something," he said. "There was one that supposedly had some sort of mechanical jaws and a flashlight attachment for evening scooping."

Amid Doggy Tongs, Pooch Scoops, and Scoop de Doos, there is an original pooper scooper: U.S. Patent #3,685,088, formal title "Means for Collecting a Dog's Excrement by the Dog's Owner or Walker." A cardboard shovel strapped to the hand by rubber bands, it was invented by Henry Doherty, an unemployed office manager from Wayne, New Jersey, and, while the Lindsay administration endorsed the contrivance, it is not Brandow's preferred method. "I think it's a waste of money," Brandow said. "I steal as many bags as I can from the Korean grocer when I go there to buy vegetables."

—*Lauren Collins*

ON THE TRAIL
FIRST TIMER



Throughout American history, the number of blind rabbis serving in Congress has remained steady at zero. In a cluttered campaign office next to the Naturoll sushi takeout in Haworth, New Jersey, Dennis Shulman is trying to change that. Shulman, who is fifty-eight, has a snowy beard and a sunny disposition. "I'm going down to Atlantic City later today to meet with the building-trades guys, and I love them," he said the other day, surrounded by a roomful of volunteers. "I don't think of my life as the sacred and the profane. I just think of it as expanding my pulpit."

Shulman grew up in a family of modest means in Worcester, Massachusetts. When he was five, he received a diagnosis of bilateral optic atrophy, a nerve disorder that gradually diminished his sight until, about a decade later, he was totally blind. Nevertheless, through high school he worked afternoons and summers at a toy factory. "I wrapped up little plastic brooms and little pans, so little girls would grow up to be housewives," he said. "The guy who ran the factory was highly regarded at the national level, because he hired the handicapped. The only problem was that he paid minimum wage, eighty-five cents an hour, which was fine with me, but not with the thirty-five-year-old working next to me."

Shulman graduated from Brandeis in 1972, and four years later he got a doctorate in clinical psychology from Harvard. His wife, Pam, was in medical school in New York, and eventually they set up practices in the city, hers as an obstetrician and his as a therapist to adults and couples. In 1981, they moved to New Jersey, where they raised two daughters, one of whom now works in Texas politics. "When I was in college, I thought I was going to be a rabbi when I grew up, but I had a spiritual crisis in my freshman year, when my high-school girlfriend died of leukemia," Shulman said. "But the feeling never disappeared, and about ten or fifteen years ago I started giving lectures to psychoanalysts about Bible stories, starting with Abraham and Isaac. My friends could see before I could that I was heading back to my old ambition." Ordained in 2003, Shulman conducts services every Saturday before a small congregation in the town of Alpine.

Even with two careers, he was restless. While teaching a course on the theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel, he became haunted by Heschel's remark "To speak about God and remain silent on Vietnam is blasphemous." "I read that and said, 'Oh, shit, I have to run for office,' " Shulman recalled. "Besides, my wife was sick of me almost throwing my shoe at the television."

Shulman, a Democrat, is running in New Jersey's Fifth Congressional District, which includes such suburbs as Ridgewood and Tenafly, in Bergen County, and some rural communities along the Pennsylvania border. Since 2002, the incumbent has been Scott Garrett, a Republican with the most conservative voting record of any member of the House from the Northeast. "He's a Neanderthal," Shulman said. (Garrett declined to comment.)

Starting as an unknown in the district, Shulman won sixty-one per cent of the vote in the June primary against two candidates, Camille Abate and Roger Bacon. ("My favorite headline from the primary was 'BLIND RABBI'S OPPONENT IS BACON,'" Shulman said.) Like New Jersey as a whole, the district has been leaning Democratic in recent years, but in 2006 Garrett won with fifty-five per cent of the vote. Still, the *Congressional Quarterly* has upgraded Shulman's chances, changing the district's rating from "Safe Republican" to "Republican Favored." Yet getting attention from the New York media for a corner of New Jersey is difficult. "The people in my district know what Mike Bloomberg eats for breakfast, but they don't know Garrett's voting record," Shulman said.

Shulman makes few concessions to his blindness; he uses a device that instantly translates Web sites and e-mail into Braille and audio. And he recognizes that the novelty of his candidacy helps draw attention. There has never been a rabbi in Congress, and its last blind members left office in 1941. Not long ago, Shulman received an encouraging phone call from David Paterson, the governor of New York, who is also visually impaired. "We agreed that there should be a conspiracy by the blind to take over all levels of government," Shulman said.

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

SQUATTERS
OBAMA'S IN-BOX

On July 27, 2004, a friend invited Guru Raj to create a Google e-mail account. A recent graduate of the University of Virginia, Raj, then twenty-one, was watching the Democratic National Convention on a television in his parents' basement, in Norcross, Georgia. The beta version of Gmail—available by invitation only—was less than four months old at the time, and largely unproved, but Raj's U.V.A. e-mail account was set to expire in a few weeks, so he decided to give Gmail a try.

At first, Raj tried to create an address using his own name, but, remarkably, both gururaj@gmail.com and rajguru@gmail.com were already taken. So he tried the name of the young senator from Illinois who was giving the Democratic keynote address on TV. To his surprise, it worked, and, moments later, barackobama@gmail.com was quietly born. "I'm not some cute little Indian boy who grew up in America with political aspirations," Raj, the first in his family to be born an American citizen, said recently. "I just thought it would be kind of funny to create an e-mail address based on a random senator whose name no one could spell."

Over the next four years, as Gmail became the third most popular Web-mail provider in the U.S. and Obama became a serious contender for the next President of the United States, Raj used the account for his personal e-mail. In the fall of 2006, he received, for the first time, a message intended for the Senator. By February, 2007, when Obama formally announced his candidacy, Raj was daily receiving dozens of misdirected notes from all over the world.

The letters expressed a range of sentiments: simple incredulity ("R U REAL?"), electoral reassurance ("Don't worry about California, they're old fogies anyway"), mystical backing ("You represent the spirit of the Lotus sutra"), conspiratorial opposition ("Obama might not be a U.S. citizen and not qualified to run for president"), niggling criticism ("You were losing your OOMPH delivering your speeches in Texas and Ohio"), sound advice ("Don't lose your humility"). Raj's favorite e-mail was a nursery rhyme that went, "Hillery Dillery Dock / Obama will clean her clock / Monica's a sin / Bu Ba fell in / Now she's gotta deal with Barack."

Other correspondents were more practical-minded—one extended an invitation to a Seder in Hyde Park ("We heard you were shooting a movie at the synagogue by our place"), while another expressed regrets ("I can't make the meeting tomorrow, but I'd like to buy a shirt—preferably a medium"). At 11:14 P.M. on May 30th, a real-estate agent from Manhattan sent the following note to barackobama@gmail.com, as well as to barackobama@hotmail.com and barackobama@yahoo.com: "Mr. Obama, good luck in the rest of the election year. Please let me know if you have any real estate needs."

Raj, who now works for a software consulting company in Washington, D.C., never replied to these, or to any other e-mails meant for Obama, not even to tell an excited would-be pen pal that he is not, in fact, the Democrats' presumptive Presidential nominee. "It just became an interesting portal into Americana," he said. "From the beginning, I had no intention of manipulating anyone."

Still, the experiment has recently begun to overwhelm him. On June 12th, barackobama@gmail.com started receiving much more spam. Raj suspects that an international political Web site posted his Gmail address, "because suddenly I was inundated." (He now receives some sixty e-mails a day addressing the Senator, most of them in foreign languages, especially Russian.) It was becoming impossible for him to separate his own electronic life from Obama's, so last fall Raj began using a backup account. This new Gmail address incorporates his first name, his last name, and—the linchpin—his middle initial. All of "Barry's messages," and those few which Raj himself still gets at barackobama@gmail.com, are diverted to a spam folder in the new account. "I check it every once in a while," Raj said, "to see if Obama's got any interesting mail."

—*Charles Bethea*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

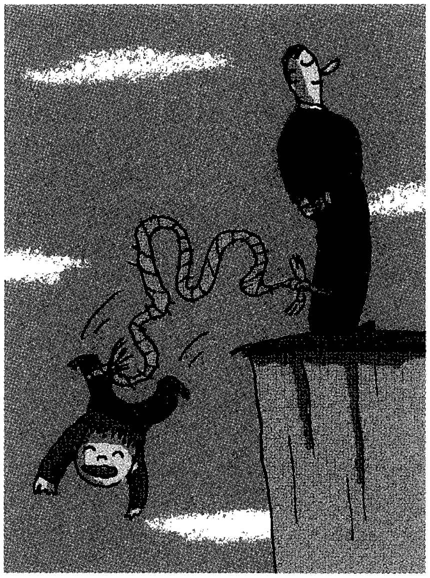
SPONSORING RECKLESSNESS

When do the words "not guaranteed" actually mean "guaranteed"? Whenever the mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are involved. The two companies have long been required to tell investors that their securities are not guaranteed by the federal government. But in the financial markets everyone has always assumed that this demurral was just window-dressing, and everyone, it turns out, was right. Last week, when fears of a possible collapse of the two companies threatened to spark a major financial crisis, the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve quickly came up with a rescue package. What had been an implicit guarantee became an explicit one.

Fannie and Freddie are the duck-billed platypuses of the financial world. They're profit-driven corporations, owned by shareholders and, in theory, beholden only to them. But they're also so-called "government-sponsored enterprises," set up by the state with the explicit mission of fostering homeownership, by buying and selling home mortgages. Unlike ordinary corporations, they're exempt from most state and local taxes and certain S.E.C. requirements, and they have access to a government credit line. Other G.S.E.s play similar roles in other markets: the Federal Home Loan Banks make loans to banks, credit unions, and thrifts; the Farm Credit Banks facilitate the flow of credit to farmers; and Farmer Mac buys up farm and rural-housing mortgages. In each case, the government saw a hole in the marketplace and chartered a company to fill it.

The G.S.E.s are curious, because there's no obvious reason for them to exist in the form they do: instead of creating private companies to do all these jobs, the government could just do them itself. In fact, that's how Fannie Mae got started, back in 1938: originally, it was a government agency endowed with the authority to buy mortgages, in the hope that this would expand the supply of credit to homeowners. It wasn't until 1968 that Fannie was privatized. (Freddie Mac was created two years later, and was private from the start.) The main reason for the change was surprisingly mundane: accounting. At the time, Lyndon Johnson was concerned about the effect of the Vietnam War on the federal budget. Making Fannie Mae private moved its liabilities off the government's books, even if, as the recent crisis made clear, the U.S. was still responsible for those debts. It was a bit like what Enron did thirty years later, when it used "special-purpose entities" to move liabilities off its balance sheet.

Making Fannie and Freddie into these weird hybrids may have spruced up the budget, but in the long run it also made it easy for the companies to grow too big, too fast. Because everyone assumed that the government would make good on Fannie's and Freddie's debts, they could borrow money more cheaply than their competitors. They used this cheap debt to increase the number of mortgages they bought. Had Fannie and Freddie been ordinary private companies, there would have been a natural check: companies with more debt are usually seen as riskier, and that makes shareholders and bondholders less willing to invest in them. Or, had Fannie and Freddie been government agencies, budget constraints would likely have limited the scope of their lending. Since neither the market nor the state checked their growth, they were able to swell extravagantly. (Regulators might have reined the companies in, but, thanks in part to ardent lobbying by Fannie and Freddie, Congress failed to provide them with sufficient power to do so.)



MARC ROSENTHAL

The result of all this was that the companies reaped the rewards of the private sector while enjoying the security of the public sector. Seemingly insulated from all harm, they became reckless. They constructed a giant pyramid of debt on a very small base of capital (eighty-one billion dollars, by the most recent publicly available figures), and by May, 2008, either owned or guaranteed more than five trillion dollars in mortgages. As a result, even though just a small percentage of Fannie's and Freddie's mortgages are delinquent, the potential losses are huge. That's why, in recent weeks, investors finally lost faith in them.

Whatever their sins, Fannie and Freddie clearly couldn't be allowed to fail, but that's no argument for letting them go on as they are. Either they should be forced to make it as private companies or they should be nationalized. Given that their business depends on the promise of government assistance and that their current state remains woeful (despite an upturn in their fortunes late last week), nationalization seems more sensible. If Fannie and Freddie are going to run up a tab and stick taxpayers with the bill, why should shareholders profit?

Beyond that question, though, is a more important one: Do we need Fannie and Freddie at all? Their supposed reason for being is that their ability to borrow money at low rates lowers borrowing costs for homeowners. But a paper by the economist Wayne Passmore, of the Federal Reserve, suggests that in fact Fannie and Freddie have only a small effect on the interest rates that homeowners pay, saving them less than one-tenth of a percentage point. More important, if the last few years have taught us anything, it's that homeownership is not an unalloyed economic good, and that we should be cautious about using gimmicks to make it more attractive. The government already offers homeowners a subsidy, in the form of a mortgage tax break. Given everything else we could be spending taxpayer money on, does the government really need to be in the mortgage-buying business, too?

—*James Surowiecki*

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LETTER FROM CHINA

ANGRY YOUTH

The new generation's neocon nationalists.

BY EVAN OSNOS

On the morning of April 15th, a short video entitled "2008 China Stand Up!" appeared on Sina, a Chinese Web site. The video's origin was a mystery: unlike the usual YouTube-style clips, it had no host, no narrator, and no signature except the initials "CTGZ."

It was a homespun documentary, and it opened with a Technicolor portrait of Chairman Mao, sunbeams radiating from his head. Out of silence came an orchestral piece, thundering with drums, as a black screen flashed, in both Chinese and English, one of Mao's mantras: "Imperialism will never abandon its intention to destroy us." Then a cut to present-day photographs and news footage, and a fevered sprint through conspiracies and betrayals—the "farces, schemes, and disasters" confronting China today. The sinking Chinese stock market (the work of foreign speculators who "wildly manipulated" Chinese stock prices and lured rookie investors to lose their fortunes). Shoppers beset by inflation, a butcher counter where "even pork has become a luxury." And a warning: this is the dawn of a global "currency war," and the West intends to "make Chinese people foot the bill" for America's financial woes.

A cut, then, to another front: rioters looting stores and brawling in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. The music crescendos as words flash across the scenes: "So-called peaceful protest!" A montage of foreign press clippings critical of China—nothing but "rumors, all speaking with one distorted voice." The screen fills with the logos of CNN, the BBC, and other news organizations, which give way to a portrait of Joseph Goebbels. The orchestra and the rhetoric climb toward a final sequence: "Obviously, there is a scheme behind the scenes to encircle China. A new Cold War!" The music turns triumphant with images of China's Olympic hurdler Liu Xiang standing in Tiananmen Square, raising the Olympic torch, "a symbol of Peace and Friendship!" But, first, one final act of treachery: in Paris, protesters attempt to wrest the Olympic torch from its official carrier, forcing guards to fend them off—a "long march" for a new era. The film ends with the image of a Chinese flag, aglow in the sunlight, and a solemn promise: "We will stand up and hold together always as one family in harmony!"

The video, which was just over six minutes long and is now on YouTube, captured the mood of nationalism that surged through China after the Tibetan uprising, in March, sparked foreign criticism of China's hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics. Citizens were greeting the criticism with rare fury. Thousands demonstrated in front of Chinese outlets of Carrefour, a French supermarket chain, in retaliation for what they considered France's sympathy for pro-Tibetan activists. Charles Zhang, who holds a Ph.D. from M.I.T. and is the founder and C.E.O. of Sohu, a leading Chinese Web portal along the lines of Yahoo, called online for a boycott of French products "to make the thoroughly biased French media and public feel losses and pain." When Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi denounced China's handling of Tibet, Xinhua, China's official news service, called her "disgusting." State-run media revived language from another age: the magazine *Outlook Weekly* warned that "domestic and foreign hostile forces have made the Beijing Olympics a focus for infiltration and sabotage." In the anonymity of the Web, decorum deteriorated. "People who fart through the mouth will get shit stuffed down their throats by me!" one commentator wrote, in a forum hosted by a semi-official newspaper. "Someone give me a gun! Don't show mercy to the enemy!" wrote another. The comments were an embarrassment to many Chinese, but they were difficult to ignore among foreign journalists who had begun receiving threats. (An anonymous letter to my fax machine in Beijing warned, "Clarify the facts on China . . . or you and your loved ones will wish you were dead.")

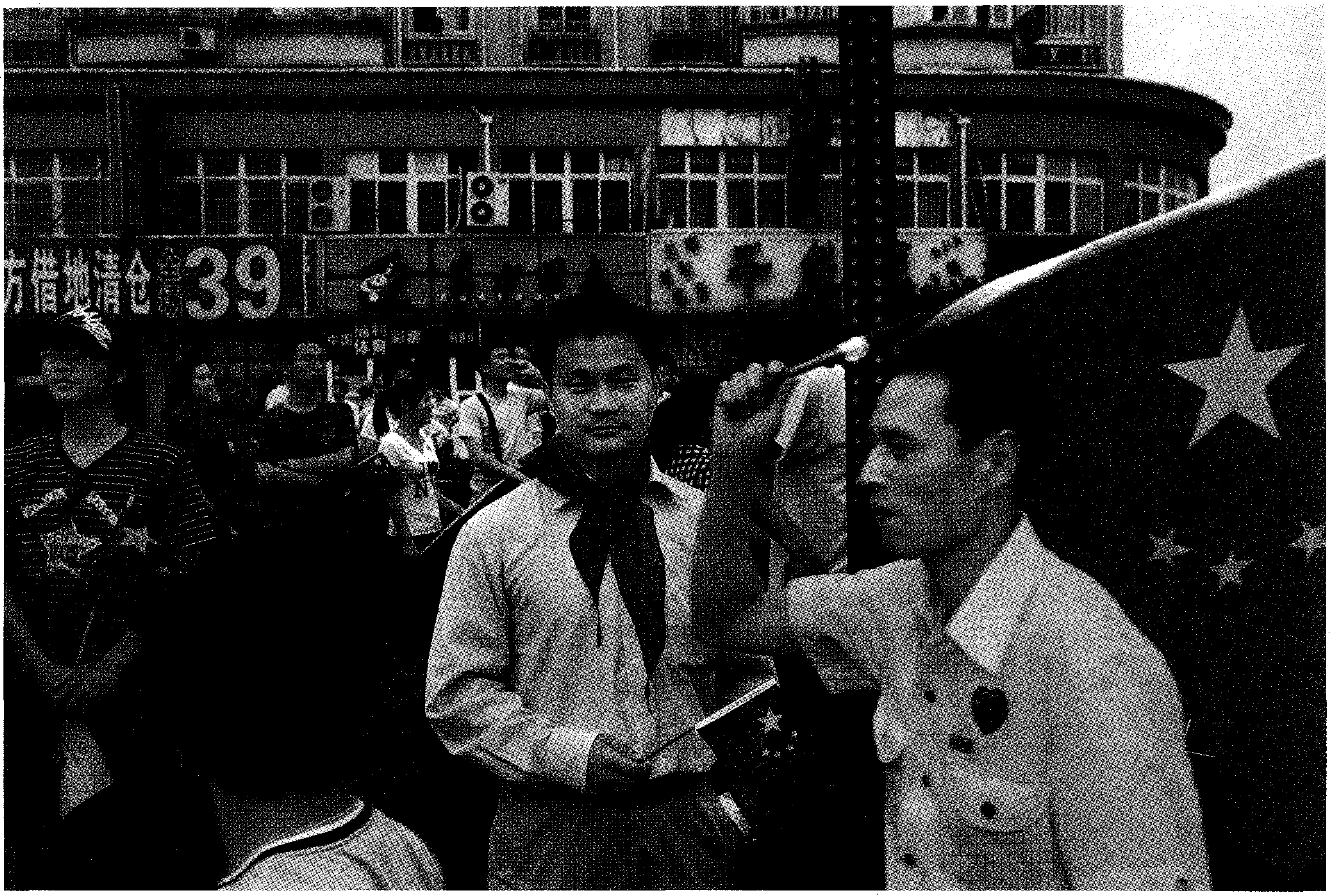
In its first week and a half, the video by CTGZ drew more than a million hits and tens of thousands of favorable comments. It rose to the site's fourth-most-popular rating. (A television blooper clip of a yawning news anchor was No. 1.) On average, the film attracted nearly two clicks per second. It became a manifesto for a self-styled vanguard in defense of China's honor, a patriotic swath of society that the Chinese call the *fen qing*, the angry youth.

Nineteen years after the crackdown on student-led protests in Tiananmen Square, China's young élite rose again this spring—not in pursuit of liberal democracy but in defense of sovereignty and prosperity. Nicholas Negroponte, the founder of M.I.T.'s Media Laboratory and one of the early ideologists of the Internet, once predicted that the global reach of the Web would transform the way we think about ourselves as countries. The state, he predicted, will evaporate "like a mothball, which goes from solid to gas directly," and "there will be no more room for nationalism than there is for smallpox." In China, things have gone differently.

A young Chinese friend of mine, who spends most of his time online, traced the screen name CTGZ to an e-mail address. It belonged to a twenty-eight-year-old graduate student in Shanghai named Tang Jie, and it was his first video. A couple of weeks later, I met Tang Jie at the gate of Fudan University, a top Chinese school, situated on a modern campus that radiates from a pair of thirty-story steel-and-glass towers that could pass for a corporate headquarters. He wore a crisp powder-blue oxford shirt, khakis, and black dress shoes. He had bright hazel eyes and rounded features—a baby face, everyone tells him—and a dusting of goatee and mustache on his chin and upper lip. He bounded over to welcome me as I stepped out of a cab, and he tried to pay my fare.

Tang spends most of his time working on his dissertation, which is on Western philosophy. He specializes in phenomenology; specifically, in the concept of "intersubjectivity," as theorized by Edmund Husserl, the German philosopher who influenced Sartre, among others. In addition to Chinese, Tang reads English and German easily, but he speaks them infrequently, so at times he swerves, apologetically, among languages. He is working on his Latin and Ancient Greek. He is so self-effacing and soft-spoken that his voice may drop to a whisper. He laughs sparingly, as if he were conserving energy. For fun, he listens to classical Chinese music, though he also enjoys screwball comedies by the Hong Kong star Stephen Chow. He is proudly unhip. The screen name CTGZ is an adaptation of two obscure terms from classical poetry: *changting* and *gongzi*, which together translate as "the noble son of the pavilion." Unlike some élite Chinese students, Tang has never joined the Communist Party, for fear that it would impugn his objectivity as a scholar.

Tang had invited some friends to join us for lunch, at Fat Brothers Sichuan Restaurant, and afterward we all climbed



Tang Jie (center) believes that American attempts to contain China may spark "a new Cold War." Photograph by Ian Teh.

PANOS PICTURES

the stairs to his room. He lives alone in a sixth-floor walkup, a studio of less than seventy-five square feet, which could be mistaken for a library storage room occupied by a fastidious squatter. Books cover every surface, and great mounds list from the shelves above his desk. His collections encompass, more or less, the span of human thought: Plato leans against Lao-tzu, Wittgenstein, Bacon, Fustel de Coulanges, Heidegger, the Koran. When Tang wanted to widen his bed by a few inches, he laid plywood across the frame and propped up the edges with piles of books. Eventually, volumes overflowed the room, and they now stand outside his front door in a wall of cardboard boxes.

Tang slumped into his desk chair. We talked for a while, and I asked if he had any idea that his video would be so popular. He smiled. "It appears I have expressed a common feeling, a shared view," he said.

Next to him sat Liu Chengguang, a cheerful, broad-faced Ph.D. student in political science who recently translated into Chinese a lecture on the subject of "Manliness" by the conservative Harvard professor Harvey Mansfield. Sprawled on the bed, wearing a gray sweatshirt, was Xiong Wenchi, who earned a Ph.D. in political science before taking a teaching job last year. And to Tang's left sat Zeng Kewei, a lean and stylish banker, who picked up a master's degree in Western philosophy before going into finance. Like Tang, each of his friends was in his twenties, was the first in his family to go to college, and had been drawn to the study of Western thought.

"China was backward throughout its modern history, so we were always seeking the reasons for why the West grew strong," Liu said. "We learned from the West. All of us who are educated have this dream: Grow strong by learning from the West."

Tang and his friends were so gracious, so thankful that I'd come to listen to them, that I began to wonder if China's anger of last spring should be viewed as an aberration. They implored me not to make that mistake.

"We've been studying Western history for so long, we understand it well," Zeng said. "We think our love for China, our support for the government and the benefits of this country, is not a spontaneous reaction. It has developed after giving the matter much thought."

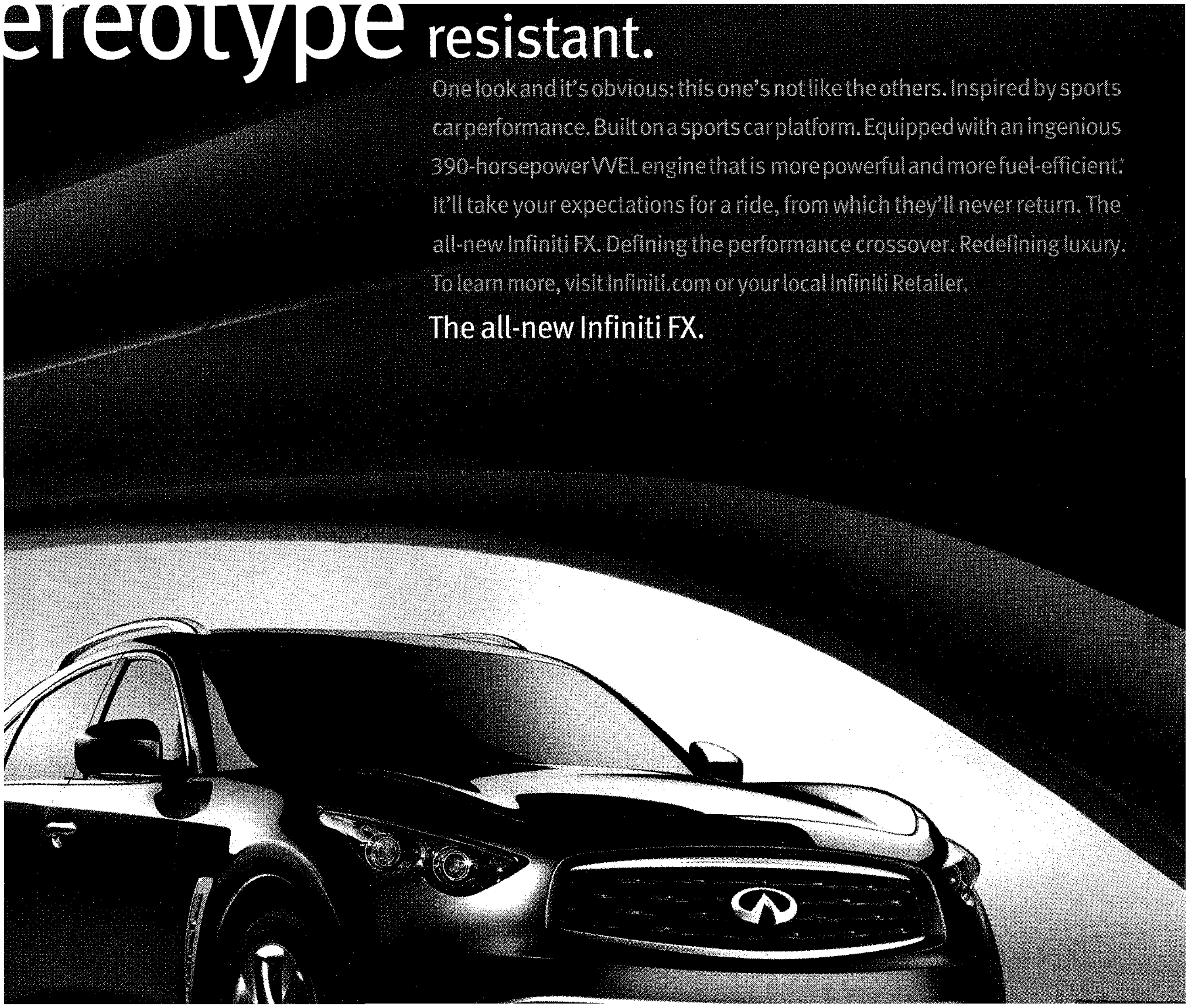
In fact, their view of China's direction, if not their vitriol, is consistent with the Chinese mainstream. Almost nine out of ten Chinese approve of the way things are going in the country—the highest share of any of the twenty-four countries surveyed this spring by the Pew Research Center. (In the United States, by comparison, just two out of ten voiced approval.) As for the more assertive strain of patriotism, scholars point to a Chinese petition against Japan's membership in the U.N. Security Council. At last count, it had attracted more than forty million signatures, roughly the population of Spain. I asked Tang to show me how he made his film. He turned to face the screen of his Lenovo desktop P.C., which has a Pentium 4 Processor and one gigabyte of memory. "Do you know Movie Maker?" he said, referring to a video-editing program. I pleaded ignorance and asked if he'd learned from a book. He glanced at me pityingly. He'd learned it on the fly from the help menu. "We must thank Bill Gates," he said.

When people began rioting in Lhasa in March, Tang followed the news closely. As usual, he was receiving his information from American and European news sites, in addition to China's official media. Like others his age, he has no hesitation about tunnelling under the government firewall, a vast infrastructure of digital filters and human censors which blocks politically objectionable content from reaching computers in China. Younger Chinese friends of mine regard the firewall as they would an officious lifeguard at a swimming pool—an occasional, largely irrelevant, intrusion.

To get around it, Tang detours through a proxy server—a digital way station overseas that connects a user with a blocked Web site. He watches television exclusively online, because he doesn't have a TV in his room. Tang also receives foreign news clips from Chinese students abroad. (According to the Institute of International Education, the number of Chinese students in the United States—some sixty-seven thousand—has grown by nearly two-thirds in the past decade.) He's baffled that foreigners might imagine that people of his generation are somehow unwise to the distortions of censorship.

"Because we are in such a system, we are always asking ourselves whether we are brainwashed," he said. "We are always eager to get other information from different channels." Then he added, "But when you are in a so-called free system you never think about whether you are brainwashed."

At the time, news and opinion about Tibet was swirling on Fudan's electronic bulletin board, or B.B.S. The board was



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alive with criticism of foreign coverage of Tibet. Tang had seen a range of foreign press clippings deemed by Chinese Web users to be misleading or unfair. A photograph on CNN.com, for instance, had been cropped around military trucks bearing down on unarmed protesters. But an uncropped version showed a crowd of demonstrators lurking nearby, including someone with an arm cocked, hurling something at the trucks. To Tang, the cropping looked like a deliberate distortion. (CNN disputed this and said that the caption fairly describes the scene.)

"It was a joke," he said bitterly. That photograph and others crisscrossed China by e-mail, scrawled with criticism, while people added more examples from the *Times* of London, Fox News, German television, and French radio. It was a range of news organizations, and, to those inclined to see it as such, it smacked of a conspiracy. It shocked people like Tang, who put faith in the Western press, but, more important, it offended them: Tang thought that he was living in the moment of greatest prosperity and openness in his country's modern history, and yet the world still seemed to view China with suspicion. As if he needed confirmation, Jack Cafferty, a CNN commentator, called China "the same bunch of goons and thugs they've been for the last fifty years," a quote that rippled across the front pages in China and for which CNN later apologized. Like many of his peers, Tang couldn't figure out why foreigners were so agitated about Tibet—an impoverished backwater, as he saw it, that China had tried for decades to civilize. Boycotting the Beijing Games in the name of Tibet seemed as logical to him as shunning the Salt Lake City Olympics to protest America's treatment of the Cherokee.

He scoured YouTube in search of a rebuttal, a clarification of the Chinese perspective, but he found nothing in English except pro-Tibet videos. He was already busy—under contract from a publisher for a Chinese translation of Leibniz's "Discourse on Metaphysics" and other essays—but he couldn't shake the idea of speaking up on China's behalf.

"I thought, O.K., I'll make something," he said.

Before Tang could start, however, he was obligated to go home for a few days. His mother had told him to be back for the harvest season. She needed his help in the fields, digging up bamboo shoots.

Tang is the youngest of four siblings from a farming family near the eastern city of Hangzhou. For breaking China's one-child policy, his parents paid fines measured in grain. Tang's birth cost them two hundred kilos of unmilled rice. ("I'm not very expensive," he says.)

Neither his mother nor his father could read or write. Until the fourth grade, Tang had no name. He went by Little Four, after his place in the family order. When that became impractical, his father began calling him Tang Jie, an abbreviated homage to his favorite comedian, Tang Jiezhong, half of a popular act in the style of Abbott and Costello.

Tang was bookish and, in a large, boisterous household, he said little. He took to science fiction. "I can tell you everything about all those movies, like 'Star Wars,' " he told me. He was a good, though not a spectacular, student, but he showed a precocious interest in ideas. "He wasn't like other kids, who spent their pocket money on food—he saved all his money to buy books," said his sister Tang Xiaoling, who is seven years older. None of his siblings had studied past the eighth grade, and they regarded him as an admirable oddity. "If he had questions that he couldn't figure out, then he couldn't sleep," his sister said. "For us, if we didn't get it we just gave up."

In high school, Tang improved his grades and had some success at science fairs as an inventor. But he was frustrated. "I discovered that science can't help your life," he said. He happened upon a Chinese translation of a fanciful Norwegian novel, "Sophie's World," by the philosophy teacher Jostein Gaarder, in which a teen-age girl encounters the history of great thinkers. "It was then that I discovered philosophy," Tang said.

Patriotism was not a particularly strong presence in his house, but landmarks of national progress became the backdrop of his adolescence. When Tang was in junior high, the Chinese were still celebrating the country's first major freeway, completed a few years before. "It was famous. We were proud of this. At last we had a highway!" he recalled one day, with a laugh, as we whizzed down an expressway in Shanghai. "Now we have highways everywhere, even in Tibet."

Supermarkets opened in his home town, and, eventually, so did an Internet café. (Tang, who was eighteen at the time, was particularly fond of the Web sites for the White House and NASA, because they had kids' sections that used simpler English sentences.) Tang enrolled at Hangzhou Normal University. He came to credit his country and his family for opportunities that his siblings had never had. By the time he reached Fudan, in 2003, he lived in a world of ideas. "He had a pure passion for philosophy," Ma Jun, a fellow philosophy student who met him early on, said. "A kind of religious passion."

The Internet had barely taken root in China before it became a vessel for nationalism. At the Atlanta Olympics, in 1996, as the Chinese delegation marched into the stadium, the NBC announcer Bob Costas riffed on China's "problems with human rights, property right disputes, the threat posed to Taiwan." Then he mentioned "suspicions" that Chinese athletes used performance-enhancing drugs. Even though the Web in China was in its infancy (there were just five telephone lines for every hundred people), comments spread instantly among Chinese living abroad. The timing couldn't have been more opportune: after more than fifteen years of reform and Westernization, Chinese writers were pushing back against Hollywood, McDonald's, and American values. An impassioned book titled "China Can Say No" came out that spring and sold more than a hundred thousand copies in its first month. Written by a group of young intellectuals, it decried China's "infatuation with America," which had suppressed the national imagination with a diet of visas, foreign aid, and advertising. If China didn't resist this "cultural strangulation," it would become "a slave," extending a history of humiliating foreign incursions that stretched back to China's defeat in the first Opium War and the British acquisition of Hong Kong, in 1842. The Chinese government, which is wary of fast-spreading new ideas, eventually pulled the book off the shelves, but not before a raft of knockoffs sought to exploit the same mood ("Why China Can Say No," "China Still Can Say No," and "China Always Say No").

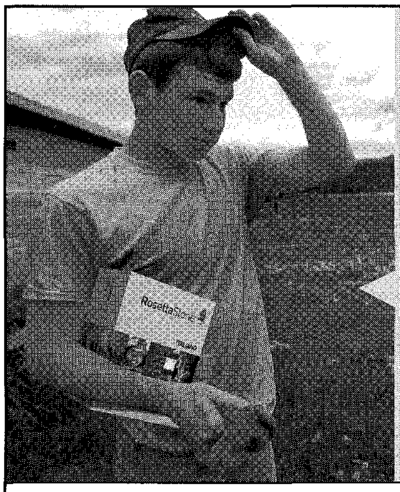
Xu Wu, a former journalist in China who is now a professor at Arizona State University, says in his 2007 book "Chinese Cyber Nationalism" that groups claiming to represent more than seventy thousand overseas Chinese wrote to NBC asking for an apology for the Costas remarks. They collected donations online and bought an ad in the Washington *Post*, accusing Costas and the network of "ignominious prejudice and inhospitality." NBC apologized, and Chinese online activism was born.

Each day, some thirty-five hundred Chinese citizens were going online for the first time. In 1998, Charles Zhang's Sohu launched China's first major search engine. The following spring, when a NATO aircraft, using American intelligence, mistakenly dropped three bombs on the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, the Chinese Web found its voice. The United States apologized, blaming outdated maps and inaccurate databases, but Chinese patriotic hackers—calling themselves "honkers," to capture the sound of *hong*, which is Chinese for the color red—attacked. As Peter Hays Gries, a China scholar at the University of Oklahoma, details in "China's New Nationalism," they plastered the home page of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing with the slogan "Down with the Barbarians!," and they caused the White House Web site to crash under a deluge of angry e-mail. "The Internet is Western," one commentator wrote, "but . . . we Chinese can use it to tell the people of the world that China cannot be insulted!"

The government treated online patriots warily. They placed their pride in the Chinese nation, not necessarily in the Party, and leaders rightly sensed that the passion could swerve against them. After a nationalist Web site was shut down by censors in 2004, one commentator wrote, "Our government is as weak as sheep!" The government permitted nationalism to grow at some moments but strained to control it at others. The following spring, when Japan approved a new textbook that critics claimed glossed over wartime atrocities, patriots in Beijing drafted protest plans and broadcast them via chat rooms, bulletin boards, and text messages. As many as ten thousand demonstrators took to the streets, hurling paint and bottles at the Japanese Embassy. Despite government warnings to cease these activities, thousands more marched in Shanghai the following week—one of China's largest demonstrations in years—and vandalized the Japanese consulate. At one point, Shanghai police cut off cell-phone service in downtown Shanghai.

"Up to now, the Chinese government has been able to keep a grip on it," Xu Wu told me. "But I call it the 'virtual Tiananmen Square.' They don't need to go there. They can do the same thing online and sometimes be even more damaging."

Tang was at dinner with friends one night in 2004 when he met Wan Manlu, an elegantly reserved Ph.D. student in Chinese literature and linguistics. Her delicate features suited her name,



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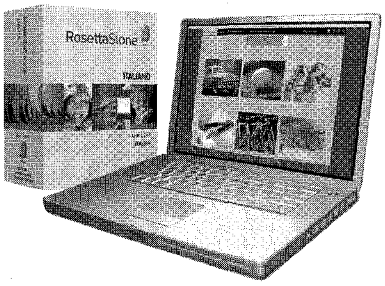

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which includes the character for the finest jade. They sat side by side, but barely spoke. Later, Tang hunted down her screen name—gracelittle—and sent her a private message on Fudan's bulletin board. They worked up to a first date: an experimental opera based on "Regret for the Past," a Chinese story.

They discovered that they shared a frustration with China's unbridled Westernization. "Chinese tradition has many good things, but we've ditched them," Wan told me. "I feel there have to be people to carry them on." She came from a middle-class home, and Tang's humble roots and old-fashioned values impressed her. "Most of my generation has a smooth, happy life, including me," she said. "I feel like our character lacks something. For example, love for the country or the perseverance you get from conquering hardships. Those virtues, I don't see them in myself and many people my age."

She added, "For him, from that kind of background, with nobody educated in his family, nobody helping him with schoolwork, with great family pressure, it's not easy to get where he is today."

They were engaged this spring. In their years together, Wan watched Tang fall in with a group of students devoted to a charismatic thirty-nine-year-old Fudan philosophy professor named Ding Yun. He is a translator of Leo Strauss, the political philosopher whose admirers include Harvey Mansfield and other neoconservatives. A Strauss student, Abram Shulsky, who co-authored a 1999 essay titled "Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence (By Which We Do Not Mean *Nous*)," ran the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans before the invasion of Iraq. Since then, other Strauss disciples have vigorously ridiculed suggestions of a connection between Strauss's thought and Bush-era foreign policy.

I saw Mansfield in Shanghai in May, during his first visit to China, at a dinner with a small group of conservative scholars. He was wearing a honey-colored panama and was in good spirits, though he seemed a bit puzzled by all the fuss they were making about him. His first question to the table: "Why would Chinese scholars be interested in Leo Strauss?"

Professor Ding teaches a Straussian regard for the universality of the classics and encourages his students to revive ancient Chinese thought. "During the nineteen-eighties and nineties, most intellectuals had a negative opinion of China's traditional culture," he told me recently. He has close-cropped hair and stylish rectangular glasses, and favors the conspicuously retro loose-fitting shirts of a Tang-dynasty scholar. When Ding grew up, in the early years of reform, "conservative" was a derogatory term, just like "reactionary," he said.

But Ding and others have thrived in recent years amid a new vein of conservatism which runs counter to China's drive for integration with the world. Just as America's conservative movement in the nineteen-sixties capitalized on the yearning for a post-liberal retreat to morality and nobility, China's classical revival draws on a nostalgic image of what it means to be Chinese. The biggest surprise best-seller of recent years is, arguably, "Yu Dan's Reflections on the Analects," a collection of Confucian lectures delivered by Yu, a telegenic Beijing professor of media studies. She writes, "To assess a country's true strength and prosperity, you can't simply look at GNP growth and not look at the inner experience of each ordinary person: Does he feel safe? Is he happy?" (Skeptics argue that it's simply "Chicken Soup for the Confucian Soul.")

Professor Ding met Tang in 2003, at the entrance interview for graduate students. "I was the person in charge of the exam," Ding recalled. "I sensed that this kid is very smart and diligent." He admitted Tang to the program, and watched with satisfaction as Tang and other students pushed back against the onslaught of Westernization. Tang developed an appetite for the classics. "The fact is we are very Westernized," he said. "Now we started reading ancient Chinese books and we rediscovered the ancient China."

This renewed pride has also affected the way Tang and his peers view the economy. They took to a theory that the world profits from China but blocks its attempts to invest abroad. Tang's friend Zeng smiled disdainfully as he ticked off examples of Chinese companies that have tried to invest in America.

"Huawei's bid to buy 3Com was rejected," he said. "C.N.O.O.C.'s bid to buy into Unocal and Lenovo's purchase of part of I.B.M. caused political repercussions. If it's not a market argument, it's a political argument. We think the world is a free market—"

Before he could finish, Tang jumped in. "This is what you—America—taught us," he said. "We opened our market, but when we try to buy your companies we hit political obstacles. It's not fair."

Their view, which is popular in China across ideological lines, has validity: American politicians have invoked national-security concerns, with varying degrees of credibility, to oppose Chinese direct investment. But Tang's view, infused with a sense of victimhood, also obscures some evidence to the contrary: China has succeeded in other deals abroad (its sovereign-wealth fund has stakes in the Blackstone Group and in Morgan Stanley), and though China has taken steps to open its markets to foreigners, it remains equally inclined to reject an American attempt to buy an asset as sensitive as a Chinese oil company.

Tang's belief that the United States will seek to obstruct China's rise—"a new Cold War"—extends beyond economics to broader American policy. Disparate issues of relatively minor importance to Americans, such as support for Taiwan and Washington's calls to raise the value of the yuan, have metastasized in China into a feeling of strategic containment. In polls, the Chinese public has not demonstrated a significant preference for either Barack Obama or John McCain, though Obama has attracted negative attention for saying that, were he President, he might boycott the opening ceremony of the Olympics. Tang and his friends have watched some debates online, but the young patriots tend to see the race in broader terms. "No matter who is elected, China is still China and will go the way it goes," one recent posting in a discussion about Obama said. "Who can stand in the way of the march of history?"

This spring, Tang stayed at his family's farm for five days before he could return to Shanghai and finish his movie. He scoured the Web for photographs on the subjects that bother him and his friends, everything from inflation to Taiwan's threats of independence. He selected some of the pictures because they were evocative—a man raising his arm in a sea of Chinese flags reminded him of Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People"—and chose others because they embodied the political moment: a wheelchair-bound Chinese amputee carrying the Olympic flame in Paris, for instance, fending off a protester who was trying to snatch it away.

For a soundtrack, he typed "solemn music" into Baidu, a Chinese search engine, and scanned the results. He landed on a piece by Vangelis, a Yanni-style pop composer from Greece who is best known for his score for the movie "Chariots of Fire." Tang's favorite Vangelis track was from a Gérard Depardieu film about Christopher Columbus called "1492: Conquest of Paradise." He watched a few seconds of Depardieu standing manfully on the deck of a tall ship, coursing across the Atlantic. Perfect, Tang thought: "It was a time of globalization."

Tang added scenes of Chairman Mao and the Olympic track star Liu Xiang, both icons of their eras. The film was six minutes and sixteen seconds long. Some title screens in English were full of mistakes, because he was hurrying, but he was anxious to release it. He posted the film to Sina and sent a note to the Fudan bulletin board. As the film climbed in popularity, Professor Ding rejoiced. "We used to think they were just a postmodern, Occidentalized generation," Ding said. "Of course, I thought the students I knew were very good, but the wider generation? I was not very pleased. To see the content of Tang Jie's video, and the scale of its popularity among the youth, made me very happy. Very happy."

Not everyone was pleased. Young patriots are so polarizing in China that some people, by changing the intonation in Chinese, pronounce "angry youth" as "shit youth."

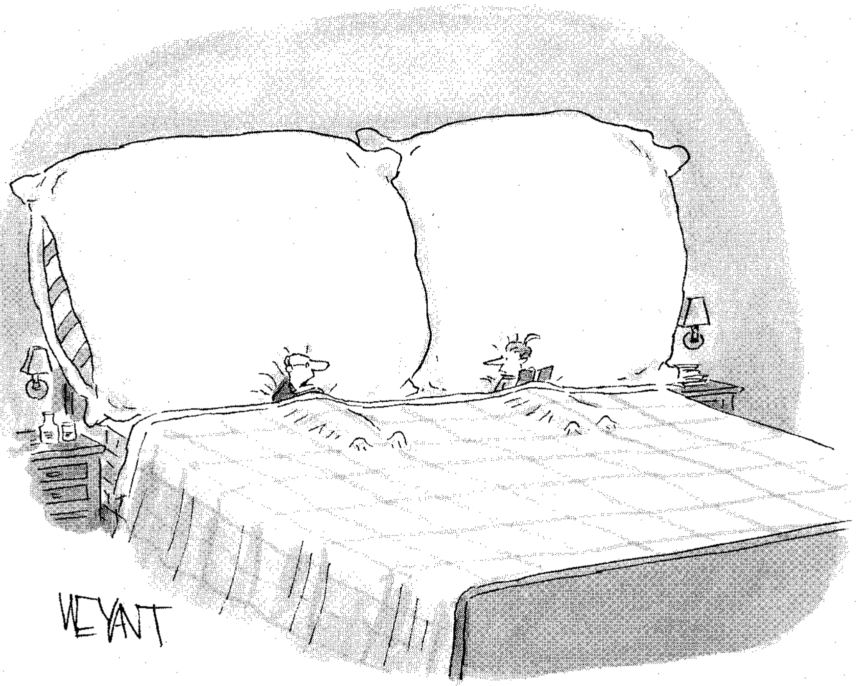
"How can our national self-respect be so fragile and shallow?" Han Han, one of China's most popular young writers, wrote on his blog, in an essay about nationalism. "Somebody says you're a mob, so you curse him, even want to beat him, and then you say, We're not a mob. This is as if someone said you were a fool, so you held up a big sign in front of his girlfriend's brother's dog, saying 'I Am Not a Fool.' The message will get to him, but he'll still think you're a fool."

If the activists thought that they were defending China's image abroad, there was little sign of success. After weeks of patriotic rhetoric emanating from China, a poll sponsored by the *Financial Times* showed that Europeans now ranked China as the greatest threat to global stability, surpassing America.

But the eruption of the angry youth has been even more disconcerting to those interested in furthering democracy. By age and education, Tang and his peers inherit a long legacy of activism that stretches from 1919, when nationalist demonstrators demanded "Mr. Democracy" and "Mr. Science," to 1989, when students flooded Tiananmen Square, challenging the government and erecting a sculpture inspired by the Statue of Liberty. Next year will mark the twentieth anniversary of that movement, but the events of this spring suggest that prosperity, computers, and Westernization have not driven China's young élite toward tolerance but, rather, persuaded more than a few of them to postpone idealism as long as life keeps improving. The students in 1989 were rebelling against corruption and abuses of power. "Nowadays, these issues haven't disappeared but have worsened," Li Datong, an outspoken newspaper editor and reform advocate, told me. "However, the current young generation turns a blind eye to it. I've never seen them respond to those major domestic issues. Rather, they take a utilitarian, opportunistic approach."

One caricature of young Chinese holds that they know virtually nothing about the crackdown at Tiananmen Square—known in Chinese as "the June 4th incident"—because the authorities have purged it from the nation's official history. It's not that simple, however. Anyone who can click on a proxy server can discover as much about Tiananmen as he chooses to learn. And yet many Chinese have concluded that the movement was misguided and naïve.

"We accept all the values of human



"Remember when all we had was lots of little pillows?"

• •

rights, of democracy," Tang told me. "We accept that. The issue is how to realize it."

I met dozens of urbane students and young professionals this spring, and we often got to talking about Tiananmen Square. In a typical conversation, one college senior asked whether she should interpret the killing of protesters at Kent State in 1970 as a fair measure of American freedom. Liu Yang, a graduate student in environmental engineering, said, "June 4th could not and should not succeed at that time. If June 4th had succeeded, China would be worse and worse, not better."

Liu, who is twenty-six, once considered himself a liberal. As a teen-ager, he and his friends happily criticized the Communist Party. "In the nineteen-nineties, I thought that the Chinese government is not good enough. Maybe we need to set up a better government," he told me. "The problem is that we didn't know what a good government would be. So we let the Chinese Communist Party stay in place. The other problem is we didn't have the power to get them out. They have the Army!"

When Liu got out of college, he found a good job as an engineer at an oil-services company. He was earning more money in a month than his parents—retired laborers living on a pension—earned in a year. Eventually, he saved enough money that, with scholarships, he was able to enroll in a Ph.D. program at Stanford. He had little interest in the patriotic pageantry of the Olympics until he saw the fracas around the torch in Paris. "We were furious," he said, and when the torch came to San Francisco he and other Chinese students surged toward the relay route to support it. I was in San Francisco not long ago, and we arranged to meet at a Starbucks near his dorm, in Palo Alto. He arrived on his mountain bike, wearing a Nautica fleece pullover and jeans.

The date, we both knew, was June 4th, nineteen years since soldiers put down the Tiananmen uprising. The overseas Chinese students' bulletin board had been alive all afternoon with discussions of the anniversary. Liu mentioned the famous photograph of an unknown man standing in front of a tank—perhaps the most provocative image in modern Chinese history.

"We really acknowledge him. We really think he was brave," Liu told me. But, of that generation, he said, "They fought for China, to make the country better. And there were some faults of the government. But, finally, we must admit that the Chinese government had to use any way it could to put down that event."

Sitting in the cool quiet of a California night, sipping his coffee, Liu said that he is not willing to risk all that his generation enjoys at home in order to hasten the liberties he has come to know in America. "Do you live on democracy?" he asked me. "You eat bread, you drink coffee. All of these are not brought by democracy. Indian guys have democracy, and some African countries have democracy, but they can't feed their own people.

"Chinese people have begun to think, One part is the good life, another part is democracy," Liu went on. "If democracy can really give you the good life, that's good. But, without democracy, if we can still have the good life why should we choose democracy?"

When the Olympic torch returned to China, in May, for the final journey to Beijing, the Chinese seemed determined to make up for its woes abroad. Crowds overflowed along the torch's route. One afternoon, Tang and I set off to watch the torch traverse a suburb of Shanghai.

At the time, the country was still in a state of shock following the May 12th earthquake in the mountains of Sichuan Province, which killed more than sixty-nine thousand people and left millions homeless. It was the worst disaster in three decades, but it also produced a rare moment of national unity. Donations poured in, revealing the positive side of the patriotism that had erupted weeks earlier.

The initial rhetoric of that nationalist outcry contained a spirit of violence that anyone old enough to remember the Red Guards—or the rise of skinheads in Europe—could not casually dismiss. And that spirit had materialized, in ugly episodes: when the Olympic torch reached South Korea, Chinese and rival protesters fought in the streets. The Korean government said it would deport Chinese agitators, though a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman stood by the demonstrators' original intent to "safeguard the dignity of the torch." Chinese students overseas emerged as some of the most vocal patriots. According to the *Times*, at the University of Southern California they marshalled statistics and photographs to challenge a visiting Tibetan monk during a lecture. Then someone threw a plastic water bottle in the monk's direction, and campus security removed the man who tossed it. At Cornell, an anthropology professor who arranged for the screening of a film on Tibet informed the crowd that, on a Web forum for Chinese students, she was "told to 'go die.' " At Duke University, Grace Wang, a Chinese freshman, tried to mediate between pro-Tibet and pro-China protesters on campus. But online she was branded a "race traitor." People ferreted out her mother's address, in the seaside city of Qingdao, and vandalized their home. Her mother, an accountant, remains in hiding. Of her mother, Grace Wang said, "I really don't know where she is, and I think it's better for me not to know."

Now in summer school at Duke, Grace Wang does not regret speaking up, but she says that she misjudged how others her age, online but frustrated in China, would resent her. "When people can't express themselves in real life, what can they do? They definitely have to express their anger toward someone. I'm far away. They don't know me, so they don't feel sorry about it. They say whatever they want." She doesn't know when she'll return home (she becomes uneasy when she is recognized in Chinese restaurants near campus), but she takes comfort in the fact that history is filled with names once vilified, later rehabilitated. "This is just like what happened in the Cultural Revolution," she said. "Think about how Deng Xiaoping was treated at that time, and then, in just ten years, things had changed completely."

In the end, nothing came of the threats to foreign journalists. No blood was shed. After the chaos around the torch in Paris, the Chinese efforts to boycott Carrefour fizzled. China's leaders, awakening to their deteriorating image abroad, ultimately reined in the students with a call for only "rational patriotism."

"We do not want any violence," Tang told me. He and his peers had merely been desperate for someone to hear them. They felt no connection to Tiananmen Square, but, in sending their voices out onto the Web, they, too, had spoken for their moment in time. Their fury, Li Datong, the newspaper editor, told me, arose from "the accumulated desire for expression—just like when a flood suddenly races into a breach." Because a flood moves in whatever direction it chooses, the young conservatives are, to China's ruling class, an unnerving new force. They "are acutely aware that their country, whose resurgence they feel and admire, has no principle to guide it," Harvey Mansfield wrote in an e-mail to me, after his visit. "Some of them see . . . that liberalism in the West has lost its belief in itself, and they turn to Leo Strauss for conservatism that is based on principle, on 'natural right.' This conservatism is distinct from a status-quo conservatism, because they are not satisfied with a country that has only a status quo and not a principle."

In the weeks after Tang's video went viral, he made a series of others, about youth, the earthquake, China's leaders. None of his follow-ups generated more than a flicker of the attention of the original. The Web had moved on—to newer nationalist films and other distractions.

As Tang and I approached the torch-relay route, he said, "Look at the people. Everyone thinks this is their own Olympics."

Venders were selling T-shirts, big Chinese flags, headbands, and mini-flags. Tang told me to wait until the torch passed, because hawkers would then cut prices by up to fifty per cent. He was carrying a plastic bag and fished around in it for a bright-red scarf of the kind that Chinese children wear to signal membership in the Young Pioneers, a kind of Socialist Boy Scouts. He tied it around his neck and grinned. He offered one to a passing teen-ager, who politely declined.

The air was stagnant and thick beneath a canopy of haze, but the mood was exuberant. Time was ticking down to the torch's arrival, and the town was coming out for a look: a man in a dark suit, sweating and smoothing his hair; a construction worker in an orange helmet and farmer's galoshes; a bellboy in a vaguely nautical getup.

Some younger spectators were wearing T-shirts inspired by China's recent troubles: "Love China, Oppose Divisions, Oppose Tibetan Independence," read a popular one. All around us, people strained for a better perch. A woman hung off a lamppost. A young man in a red headband climbed a tree.

The crowd's enthusiasm seemed to brighten Tang's view of things, reminding him that China's future belongs to him and to those around him. "When I stand here, I can feel, deeply, the common emotion of Chinese youth," he said. "We are self-confident."

Police blocked the road. A frisson swept through the crowd. People surged toward the curb, straining to see over one another's heads. But Tang hung back. He is a patient man. ♦

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Evan Osnos takes questions about China.

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BY PAUL SIMMS

Ladies and gentlemen, as I've campaigned across this great country of ours, one of my greatest pleasures has been meeting all the wonderful Americans whose voices are so rarely heard—and whose stories are so rarely told.

I'm thinking of the young woman I met in Texahoma, Texas: a single mother who has three full-time jobs—but no health insurance. Or the young man I met in Oklatexa, Oklahoma, who has tons and tons of health insurance—but no job. I'll never forget the look in that young man's eye when he said to me, "Also, I'm single, and I'd like to meet a woman who already has children and who preferably lives in an adjoining state."

These are the moments when you realize that the current system has failed us, and that there's absolutely nothing you can do to help.

I'm thinking of married couples like Jim and Sheila R., of Fort Injun, Wyoming. Jim has spent most of his fifty years laboring manually in a pebble mine. And Sheila—without any government aid—has started a foundation to enlighten Americans about the putative value of hand-mined pebbles. But despite a banner sales year, during which they sold almost six sacks of their artisanal-quality hand-mined pebbles, they still haven't been able to scrape together enough money to buy a last name.

I'm talking about people like the wonderful Mexican gentleman I met in Hilltop Hollow, Arizona, who, when I told him of my great affection for the country of Mexico, looked me in the eye and said, "*Yo soy de Nicaragua.*" Which reminded me how I've always thought that one of the most beautiful languages in the whole world is Mexican.

Or the young man who walked up to me after a speech in Townville, South Dakota. He handed me a 1923 silver dollar and said, "This coin used to belong to my father. It was his prize possession. But I want you to have it now. And I want you to carry it with you on your travels from state to state." And, as I was thanking him, this young man looked me right in the eye and said, "Actually, I stole it from my father five minutes ago. He's standing right over there. No—don't look, don't look. Be cool. Maintain. Just put it in your pocket. I'll be in touch." And with that he walked away.

I'm talking about the young man—a boy, really; he couldn't have been more than eleven or twelve years old—whom I met in an online game of Halo, who said to me, "Headshot! Suck it! Pwned! Be less gay!," after he had killed me by camping a respawn point, which really should be illegal.

I'm talking about the mother of five in Badhampton, New York, who told me, "Between getting the kids up at 5 A.M. for gymnastics practice, then driving them to school, then taking the dogs to the vet, then picking up the kids after school and taking them to gymnastics meets, then feeding the dogs, then putting the kids to bed, then walking the dogs, then waking the kids and the dogs up for midnight gymnastics practice, I still worry that I'll never realize my dream of assembling the world's most awesome dogs-plus-humans gymnastics troupe."

I'm talking about the middle-aged man from Monterey, California—a Mr. Sammy Hagar—who told me, "I can't drive fifty-five." To tell the truth, I never had the good fortune to meet Sammy face to face, but we did have a long and fruitful one-way conversation through my car stereo one night during a Classic Rock Block.

I'm thinking and talking about a man I met in New Carsmell, Vermont, before my campaign even began. He had inherited from his step-uncle, after much legal wrangling, the family diner. I remember as if it were yesterday asking this man for a ham-and-cheese sandwich. And he made me one. But, before he served it to me, he smooshed it down in this hot-presser thing that sort of looked like a copy machine. So, when it was done, the sandwich was like a flattened-out grilled cheese with ham, which the man claimed was an Italian delicacy. That thing was delicious. I can't remember right now what it's called, but more and more places are starting to serve them, so, if you ever get the chance to have one, definitely try it. I think it might have been called a "pannioli" or something. Something Italian-sounding.

But I digress.

What I'm really trying to talk about on this great occasion is women like your mother, whose decades-long struggle with morbid obesity has earned her much renown in the urban folklore of our great land. That's right—your mother: a woman who is said to be so fat that, when she sat down on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday got bounced into the middle of next week. If I could, I would give her a medal, even though she would probably eat it, thinking there's chocolate inside.

As I conclude my remarks here tonight, I can't help but think of whichever one of you it was in the audience who sarcastically applauded when I said "As I conclude my remarks" a few seconds ago. It's easier to tear down than to build up, Ma'am. And I call you "Ma'am" with the full knowledge that you're probably actually a guy, because I just got you back.

You know, when I began this campaign, people said I was crazy. They said it couldn't be done. They said that no one, in the entire history of American politics, had ever mounted and run and, God willing, won a national campaign to be elected King of Prussia. They said that King of Prussia is not really an elected office. They said that King of Prussia is just the funny name of a town in Pennsylvania. They said that when most people hear the phrase "King of Prussia" they think of the famous mall there, and not of the governmental position that apparently does not exist.

Well, maybe they're right.

O.K., that's the part where you're all supposed to yell, "No!"

Nothing? No one?

Whatever. Fine. I'll be in the food court if anyone wants to sign my petition or have a photo op or buy me a Burrito Supreme. ♦

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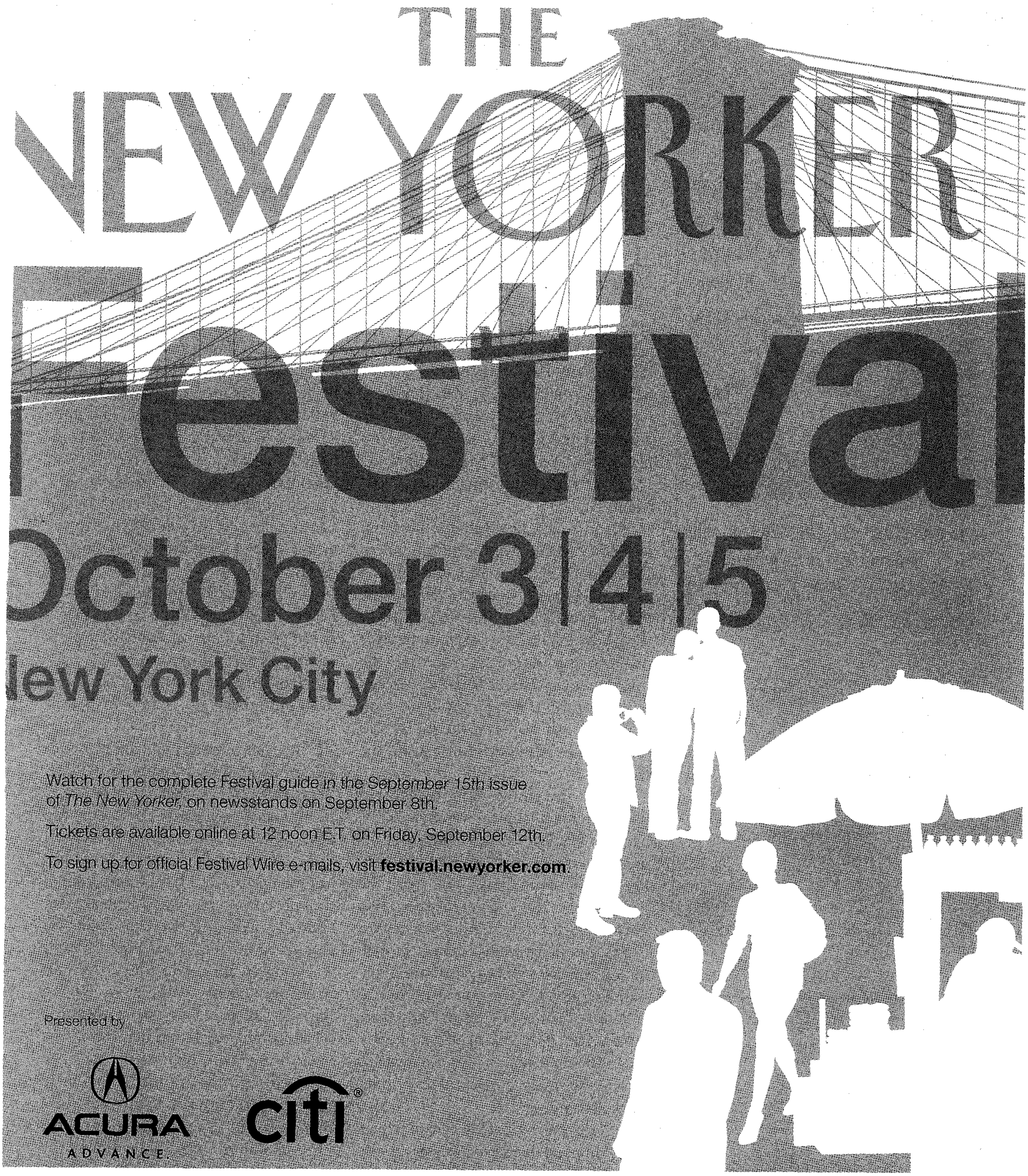

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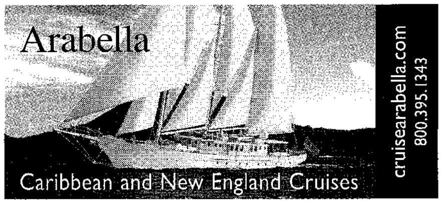

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ANNALS OF SCIENCE

THE EUREKA HUNT

Why do good ideas come to us when they do?

BY JONAH LEHRER

The summer of 1949 was long and dry in Montana. On the afternoon of August 5th—the hottest day ever recorded in the state—a lightning fire was spotted in a remote area of pine forest. A parachute brigade of fifteen firefighters known as smoke jumpers was dispatched to put out the blaze; the man in charge was named Wag Dodge. When the jumpers left Missoula, in a C-47 cargo plane, they were told that the fire was small, just a few burning acres in the Mann Gulch.

Mann Gulch, nearly three miles long, is a site of geological transition, where the Great Plains meet the Rocky Mountains, pine trees give way to tall grasses, and steep cliffs loom over the steppes of the Midwest. The fire began in the trees on one side of the gulch. By the time the firefighters arrived, the blaze was already out of control. Dodge moved his men along the other side of the gulch and told them to head downhill, toward the water.

When the smoke jumpers started down the gulch, a breeze was blowing the flames away from them. Suddenly, the wind reversed, and Dodge watched the fire leap across the gulch and spark the grass on his side. He and his men were only a quarter mile uphill. An updraft began, and fierce winds howled through the canyon as the fire sucked in the surrounding air. Dodge was suddenly staring at a wall of flame fifty feet tall and three hundred feet deep. In a matter of seconds, the fire began to devour the grass, hurtling toward the smoke jumpers at seven hundred feet a minute.

Dodge screamed at his men to retreat. They dropped their gear and started running up the steep canyon walls, trying to reach the top of the ridge. After a few minutes, Dodge glanced over his shoulder and saw that the fire was less than fifty yards away. He realized that the blaze couldn't be outrun; the gulch was too steep, the flames too fast.

So Dodge stopped running. The decision wasn't as suicidal as it appeared: in a moment of desperate insight, he had devised an escape plan. He lit a match and ignited the ground in front of him, the flames quickly moving up the grassy slope. Then Dodge stepped into the shadow of his fire, so that he was surrounded by a buffer of burned land. He wet his handkerchief with water from his canteen, clutched the cloth to his mouth, and lay down on the smoldering embers. He closed his eyes and tried to inhale the thin layer of oxygen clinging to the ground. Then he waited for the fire to pass over him.

Thirteen smoke jumpers died in the Mann Gulch fire. White crosses below the ridge still mark the spots where the men died. But after several terrifying minutes Dodge emerged from the ashes, virtually unscathed.

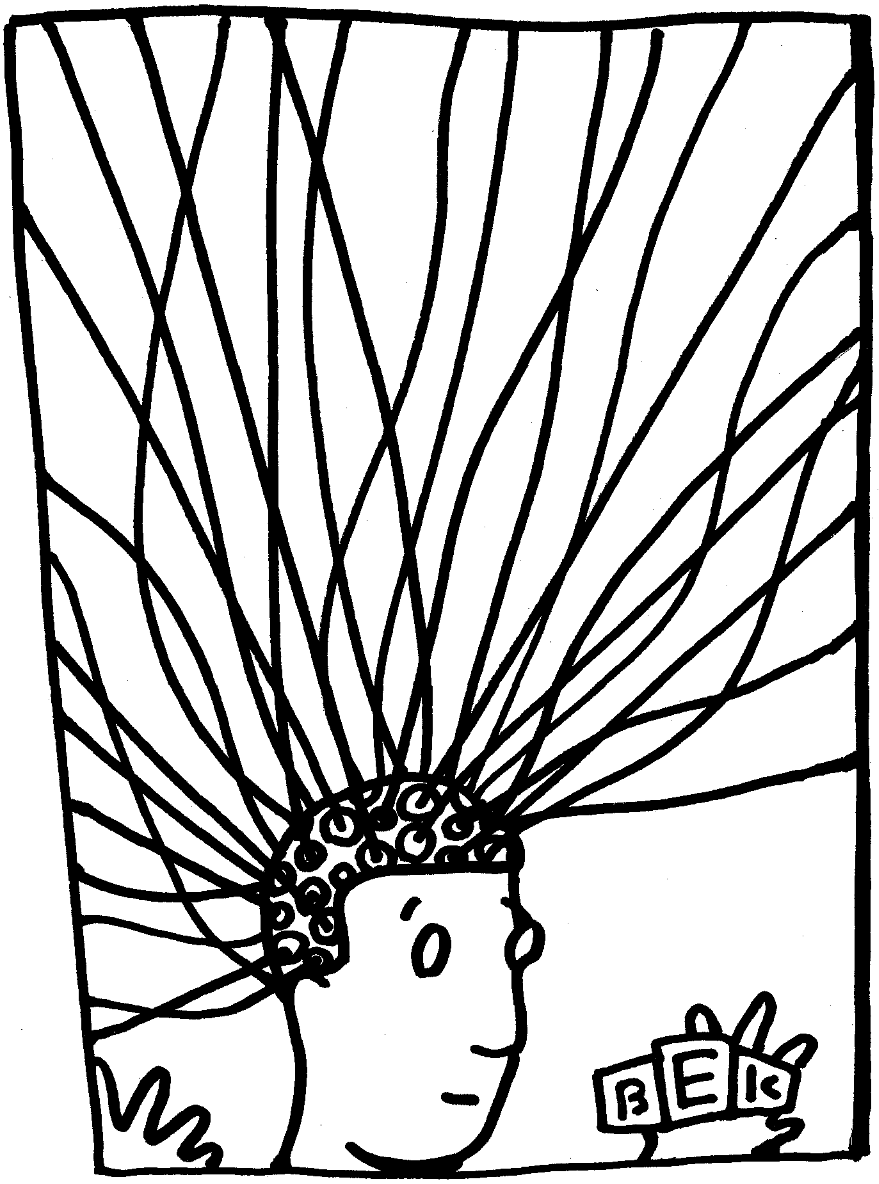
There is something inherently mysterious about moments of insight. Wag Dodge, for instance, could never explain where his idea for the escape fire came from. ("It just seemed the logical thing to do" was all he could muster.) His improbable survival has become one of those legendary stories of insight, like Archimedes shouting "Eureka!" when he saw his bathwater rise, or Isaac Newton watching an apple fall from a tree and then formulating his theory of gravity. Such tales all share a few essential features, which psychologists and neuroscientists use to define "the insight experience." The first of these is the impasse: before there can be a breakthrough, there has to be a mental block. Wag Dodge spent minutes running from the fire, although he was convinced that doing so was futile. Then, when the insight arrived, Dodge immediately realized that the problem was solved. This is another key feature of insight: the feeling of certainty that accompanies the idea. Dodge didn't have time to think about whether his plan would work. He simply knew that it would.

Mark Jung-Beeman, a cognitive neuroscientist at Northwestern University, has spent the past fifteen years trying to figure out what happens inside the brain when people have an insight. "It's one of those defining features of the human mind, and yet we have no idea how or why it happens," he told me. Insights have often been attributed to divine intervention, but, by mapping the epiphany as a journey between cortical circuits, Jung-Beeman wants to purge the insight experience of its mystery. Jung-Beeman has a tense smile, a receding hairline, and the wiry build of a long-distance runner. He qualified for the 1988 and 1992 Olympic trials in the fifteen hundred metres, although he gave up competitive running after, as he puts it, "everything below the hips started to fall apart." He now subsists on long walks and manic foot tapping. When Jung-Beeman gets excited about an idea—be it the cellular properties of pyramidal neurons or his new treadmill—his speech accelerates, and he starts to draw pictures on whatever paper is nearby. It's as if his mind were sprinting ahead of his mouth.

Jung-Beeman became interested in the nature of insight in the early nineteen-nineties, while researching the right hemisphere of the brain. At the time, he was studying patients who had peculiar patterns of brain damage. "We had a number of patients with impaired right hemispheres," he said. "And the doctors would always say, 'Wow, you're lucky—it got the right hemisphere. That's the minor hemisphere. It doesn't do much, and it doesn't do anything with language.' " But it gradually became clear to Jung-Beeman that these patients did have serious cognitive problems after all, particularly with understanding linguistic nuance, and he began to suspect that the talents of the right hemisphere had been overlooked. If the left hemisphere excelled at denotation—storing the primary meaning of a word—Jung-Beeman suspected that the right hemisphere dealt with connotation, everything that gets left out of a dictionary definition, such as the emotional charge in a sentence or a metaphor. "Language is so complex that the brain has to process it in two different ways at the same time," he said. "It needs to see the forest *and* the trees. The right hemisphere is what helps you see the forest."

It wasn't clear how to pinpoint these nuanced aspects of cognition, because the results of right-hemisphere damage were harder to spot than those of left-hemisphere damage. But in 1993 Jung-Beeman heard a talk by the psychologist Jonathan Schooler on moments of insight. Schooler had demonstrated that it was possible to interfere with insight by making people explain their thought process while trying to solve a puzzle—a phenomenon he called "verbal overshadowing." This made sense to Jung-Beeman, since the act of verbal explanation would naturally shift activity to the left hemisphere, causing people to ignore the more subtle associations coming from the right side of the brain. "That's when I realized that insight could be a really interesting way to look at all these skills the right hemisphere excelled at," he said. "I guess I had an insight about insight."

Jung-Beeman began searching in the right hemisphere for the source of insight in the brain. He decided to compare puzzles solved in moments of insight with those solved by methodical testing of potential solutions, in which people could accurately trace their thought process and had no sense of surprise when the answer came. Unfortunately, all the classic puzzles developed by scientists to study insight *required* insight; if subjects didn't solve them in a sudden "Aha!" moment, they didn't solve them at all. In a popular puzzle known as "the candle problem," for instance, subjects are given a cardboard



BRUCE ERIC KAPLAN

Brain-imaging techniques are revealing how our minds produce insight.

box containing a few thumbtacks, a book of matches, and a candle. They are told to attach the candle to a piece of corkboard so that it can burn properly. Nearly ninety per cent of people pursue the same two strategies. They try to tack the candle directly to the board, which causes the candle wax to shatter. Or they try melting the candle with the matches, so that it sticks to the board; but the wax doesn't hold and the candle falls. Only four per cent of people manage to come up with the solution, which involves attaching the candle to the cardboard box and tacking the cardboard box to the corkboard.

To isolate the brain activity that defined the insight process, Jung-Beeman needed to develop a set of puzzles that could be solved either by insight or by analysis. Doing so was a puzzle in itself. "It can get pretty frustrating trying to find an experimentally valid brainteaser," Jung-Beeman said. "The puzzles can't be too hard or too easy, and you need to be able to generate lots of them." He eventually settled on a series of verbal puzzles, based on ones used by a psychologist in the early nineteen-sixties, which he named the Compound Remote Associate Problems, or CRAP. (The joke is beginning to get old, and in his scientific papers Jung-Beeman decorously leaves off the final "P.")

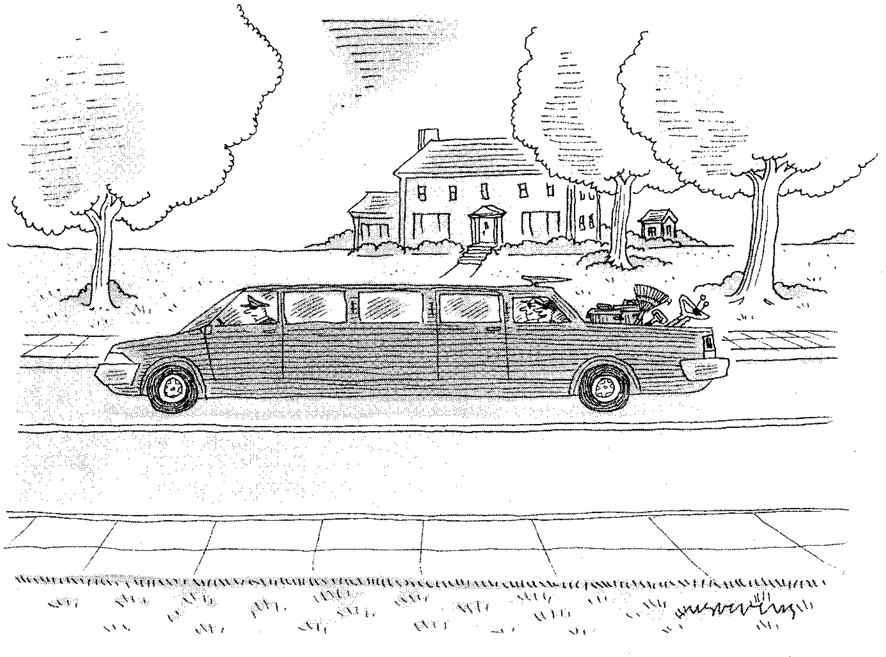
In a C.R.A. word puzzle, a subject is given three words, such as "pine," "crab," and "sauce," and asked to think of a word that can be combined with all three—in this case, "apple" ("pineapple," "crab apple," "apple sauce"). The subjects have up to thirty seconds to solve the puzzle. If they come up with an answer, they press the space bar on the keyboard and say whether the answer arrived via insight or analysis. When I participated in the experiment in Jung-Beeman's lab, I found that it was surprisingly easy to differentiate between the two cognitive paths. When I solved puzzles with analysis, I tended to sound out each possible word combination, cycling through all the words that went with "pine" and then seeing if they also worked with "crab" or "sauce." If I worked toward a solution, I always double-checked it before pressing the space bar. An insight, on the other hand, felt instantaneous: the answer arrived like a revelation.

Jung-Beeman initially asked his subjects to solve the puzzles while inside an fMRI machine, a brain scanner that monitors neural activity by tracking changes in blood flow. But fMRI has a three-to-five-second delay, as the blood diffuses across the cortex. "Insights happen too fast for fMRI," Jung-Beeman said. "The data was just too messy." Around this time, he teamed up with John Kounios, a cognitive neuroscientist at Drexel University, who was interested in insight largely because it seemed to contradict the classic model of learning, in which the learning process was assumed to be gradual. Kounios, a man with a shock of unruly wavy hair and an affinity for rumpled button-up vests, had been working with electroencephalography, or EEG, which measures the waves of electricity produced by the brain by means of a nylon hat filled with greased electrodes. (The device looks like a bulky shower cap.) Because there is no time delay with EEG, Kounios thought it could be useful for investigating the fleeting process of insight. Unfortunately, the waves of electricity can't be traced back to their precise source, but Kounios and Jung-Beeman saw that combining EEG with fMRI might allow them to construct a precise map, both in time and space, of the insight process.

The resulting studies, published in 2004 and 2006, found that people who solved puzzles with insight activated a specific subset of cortical areas. Although the answer seemed to appear out of nowhere, the mind was carefully preparing itself for the breakthrough. The first areas activated during the problem-solving process were those involved with executive control, like the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex. The scientists refer to this as the "preparatory phase," since the brain is devoting its considerable computational power to the problem. The various sensory areas, like the visual cortex, go silent as the brain suppresses possible distractions. "The cortex does this for the same reason we close our eyes when we're trying to think," Jung-Beeman said. "Focus is all about blocking stuff out."

What happens next is the "search phase," as the brain starts looking for answers in all the relevant places. Because Jung-Beeman and Kounios were giving people word puzzles, they saw additional activity in areas related to speech and language. The search can quickly get frustrating, and it takes only a few seconds before people say that they've reached an impasse, that they can't think of the right word. "Almost all of the possibilities your brain comes up with are going to be wrong," Jung-Beeman said. "And it's up to the executive-control areas to keep on searching or, if necessary, change strategies and start searching somewhere else."

But sometimes, just when the brain is about to give up, an insight appears.



"Lawn care has been good to us, Ed."

"You'll see people bolt up in their chair and their eyes go all wide," Ezra Wegbreit, a graduate student in the Jung-Beeman lab who often administers the C.R.A. test, said. "Sometimes they even say 'Aha!' before they blurt out the answer." The suddenness of the insight comes with a burst of brain activity. Three hundred milliseconds before a participant communicates the answer, the EEG registers a spike of gamma rhythm, which is the highest electrical frequency generated by the brain. Gamma rhythm is thought to come from the "binding" of neurons, as cells distributed across the cortex draw themselves together into a new network, which is then able to enter consciousness. It's as if the insight had gone incandescent.

Jung-Beeman and Kounios went back and analyzed the information from the fMRI experiment to see what was happening inside the brain in the seconds before the gamma burst. "My biggest worry was that we would find nothing," Kounios said. "I thought there was a good possibility that whatever we found on the EEG wouldn't show up on the brain imaging." When the scientists looked at the data, however, they saw that a small fold of tissue on the surface of the right hemisphere, the anterior superior temporal gyrus (aSTG), became unusually active in the second before the insight. The activation was sudden and intense, a surge of electricity leading to a rush of blood. Although the function of the aSTG remains mostly a mystery—the brain is stuffed with obscurities—Jung-Beeman wasn't surprised to see it involved with the insight process. A few previous studies had linked the area to aspects of language comprehension, such as the detection of literary themes and the interpretation of metaphors. (A related area was implicated in the processing of jokes.) Jung-Beeman argues that these linguistic skills, like insight, require the brain to make a set of distant and unprecedented connections. He cites studies showing that cells in the right hemisphere are more "broadly tuned" than cells in the left hemisphere, with longer branches and more dendritic spines. "What this means is that neurons in the right hemisphere are collecting information from a larger area of cortical space," Jung-Beeman said. "They are less precise but better connected." When the brain is searching for an insight, these are the cells that are most likely to produce it.

The insight process, as sketched by Jung-Beeman and Kounios, is a delicate mental balancing act. At first, the brain lavishes the scarce resource of attention on a single problem. But, once the brain is sufficiently focussed, the cortex needs to relax in order to seek out the more remote association in the right hemisphere, which will provide the insight. "The relaxation phase is crucial," Jung-Beeman said. "That's why so many insights happen during warm showers." Another ideal moment for insights, according to the scientists, is the early morning, right after we wake up. The drowsy brain is unwound and disorganized, open to all sorts of unconventional ideas. The right hemisphere is also unusually active. Jung-Beeman said, "The problem with the morning, though, is that we're always so rushed. We've got to get the kids ready for school, so we leap out of bed and never give ourselves a chance to think." He recommends that, if we're stuck on a difficult problem, it's better to set the alarm clock a few minutes early so that we have time to lie in bed and ruminate. We do some of our best thinking when we're still half asleep.

As Jung-Beeman and Kounios see it, the insight process is an act of cognitive deliberation—the brain must be focussed on the task at hand—transformed by accidental, serendipitous connections. We must concentrate, but we must concentrate on letting the mind wander. The patterns of brain activity that define this particular style of thought have recently been studied by Joy Bhattacharya, a psychologist at Goldsmiths, University of London. Using EEG, he has found that he can tell which subjects will solve insight puzzles up to eight seconds before the insight actually arrives. One of the key predictive signals is a steady rhythm of alpha waves emanating from the right hemisphere. Alpha waves typically correlate with a state of relaxation, and Bhattacharya believes that such activity makes the brain more receptive to new and unusual ideas. He has also found that unless subjects have sufficient alpha-wave activity they won't be able to make use of hints the researchers give them.

One of the surprising lessons of this research is that trying to force an insight can actually prevent the insight. While it's commonly assumed that the best way to solve a difficult problem is to focus, minimize distractions, and pay attention only to the relevant details, this clenched state of mind may inhibit the sort of creative connections that lead to sudden breakthroughs. We suppress the very type of brain activity that we should be encouraging. Jonathan Schooler has recently demonstrated that making people focus on the details of a visual scene, as opposed to the big picture, can significantly disrupt the insight process. "It doesn't take much to shift the brain into left-hemisphere mode," he said. "That's when you stop paying attention to those more holistic associations coming in from the right hemisphere." Meanwhile, in a study published last year, German researchers found that people with schizotypy—a mental condition that resembles schizophrenia, albeit with far less severe symptoms—were significantly better at solving insight problems than a control group. Schizotypal subjects have enhanced right-hemisphere function and tend to score above average on measures of creativity and associative thinking.

Schooler's research has also led him to reconsider the bad reputation of letting one's mind wander. Although we often complain that the brain is too easily distracted, Schooler believes that letting the mind wander is essential. "Just look at the history of science," he said. "The big ideas seem to always come when people are sidetracked, when they're doing something that has nothing to do with their research." He cites the example of Henri Poincaré, the nineteenth-century mathematician, whose seminal insight into non-Euclidean geometry arrived while he was boarding a bus. "At the moment when I put my foot on the step," Poincaré wrote, "the idea came to me, without anything in my former thoughts seeming to have paved the way for it. . . . I did not verify the idea; I should not have had the time, as, upon taking my seat in the omnibus, I went on with the conversation already commenced, but I felt a perfect certainty." Poincaré credited his sudden mathematical insight to "unconscious work," an ability to mull over the mathematics while he was preoccupied with unrelated activities, like talking to a friend on the bus. In his 1908 essay "Mathematical Creation," Poincaré insisted that the best way to think about complex problems is to immerse yourself in the problem until you hit an impasse. Then, when it seems that "nothing good is accomplished," you should find a way to distract yourself, preferably by going on a "walk or a journey." The answer will arrive when you least expect it. Richard Feynman, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist, preferred the relaxed atmosphere of a topless bar, where he would sip 7 UP, "watch the entertainment," and, if inspiration struck, scribble equations on cocktail napkins.

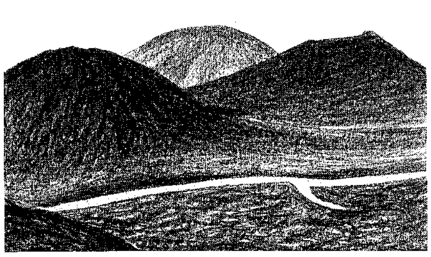
Kounios and Jung-Beeman aren't quite ready to offer extensive practical advice, but, when pressed, they often sound like Poincaré. "You've got to know when to step back," Kounios said. "If you're in an environment that forces you to produce and produce, and you feel very stressed, then you're not going to have any insights." Many stimulants, like caffeine, Adderall, and Ritalin, are taken to increase focus—one recent poll found that nearly twenty per cent of scientists and researchers regularly took prescription drugs to "enhance concentration"—but, according to Jung-Beeman and Kounios, drugs may actually make insights less likely, by sharpening the spotlight of attention and discouraging mental rambles. Concentration, it seems, comes with the hidden cost of diminished creativity. "There's a good reason Google puts Ping-Pong tables in their headquarters," Kounios said. "If you want to encourage insights, then you've got to also encourage people to relax." Jung-Beeman's latest paper investigates why people who are in a good mood are so much better at solving insight puzzles. (On average, they solve nearly twenty per cent more C.R.A. problems.)

Last year, Kounios and Jung-Beeman were invited to present their findings to DARPA, the central research agency of the Department of Defense. ("It was quite strange," Kounios recalls. "I never thought I'd be talking about creativity to national-security officials.") DARPA was interested in finding ways to encourage insights amid the stress of war, fostering creativity on the battlefield. The scientists are convinced that it's only a matter of time before it becomes possible to "up-regulate" insight. "This could be a drug or technology or just a new way to structure our environment," Jung-Beeman said. "I think we'll soon get to the point where we can do more than tell people to take lots of showers."

For now, though, the science of promoting insight remains rooted in anecdote, in stories of people, like Poincaré, who were able to consistently induce the necessary state of mind. Kounios tells a story about an expert Zen meditator who took part in one of the C.R.A. insight experiments. At first, the meditator couldn't solve any of the insight problems. "This Zen guy went through thirty or so of the verbal puzzles and just drew a blank," Kounios said. "He was used to being very focussed, but you can't solve these problems if you're too focussed." Then, just as he was about to give up, he started solving one puzzle after another, until, by the end of the experiment, he was getting them all right. It was an unprecedented streak. "Normally, people don't get better as the task goes along," Kounios said. "If anything, they get a little bored." Kounios believes that the dramatic improvement of the Zen meditator came from his paradoxical ability to focus on *not* being focussed, so that he could pay attention to those remote associations in the right hemisphere. "He had the cognitive control to let go," Kounios said. "He became an insight machine."

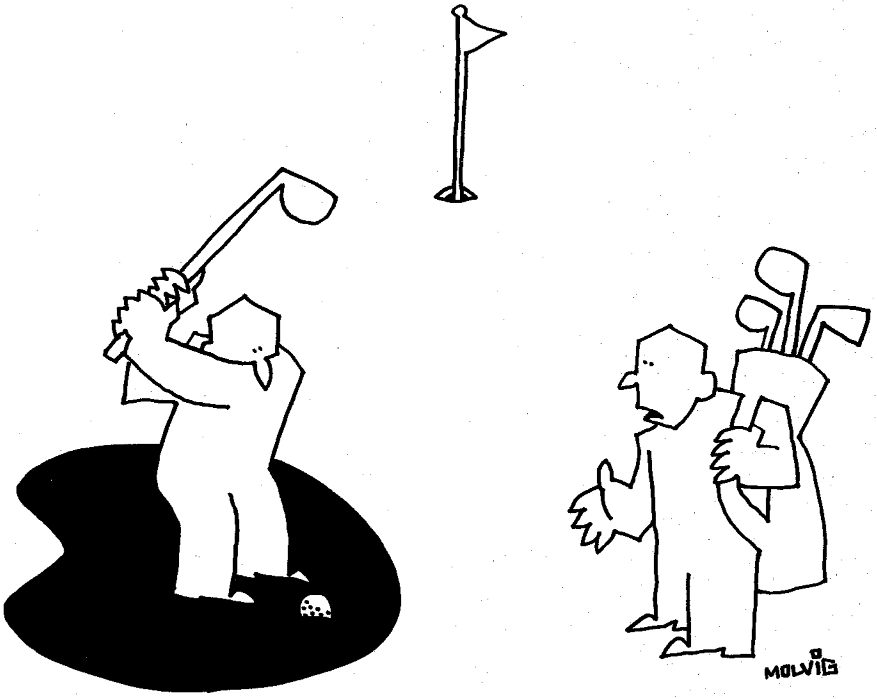
The most mysterious aspect of insight is not the revelation itself but what happens next. The brain is an infinite library of associations, a cacophony of competing ideas, and yet, as soon as the right association appears, we know. The new thought, which is represented by that rush of gamma waves in the right hemisphere, immediately grabs our attention. There is something paradoxical and bizarre about this. On the one hand, an epiphany is a surprising event; we are startled by what we've just discovered. Some part of our brain, however, clearly isn't surprised at all, which is why we are able to instantly recognize the insight. "As soon as the insight happens, it just seems so obvious," Schooler said. "People can't believe they didn't see it before."

The brain area responsible for this act of recognition is the prefrontal cortex, which lights up whenever people are shown the right answer—even if they haven't come up with the answer themselves. Pressed tight against the bones of the forehead, the prefrontal cortex has undergone a dramatic expansion during human evolution, so that it now represents nearly a third of the brain. While this area is often associated with the most specialized aspects of human cognition, such as abstract reasoning, it also plays a critical role in the insight process. Hallucinogenic drugs are thought to work largely by modulating the prefrontal cortex, tricking the brain into believing that its sensory delusions are revelations. People have the feeling of an insight but without the content. Understanding how this happens—how a circuit of cells can identify an idea as an insight, even if the idea has yet to enter awareness—requires an extremely precise level of investigation. The rhythms of brain waves and the properties of blood can't answer the question. Instead, it's necessary to study the brain at its most basic level, as a loom of electrical cells.



Earl Miller is a neuroscientist at M.I.T. who has devoted his career to understanding the prefrontal cortex. He has a shiny shaved head and a silver goatee. His corner office in the gleaming Picower Institute is cantilevered over a railroad track, and every afternoon the quiet hum of the lab is interrupted by the rattle of a freight train. Miller's favorite word is "exactly"—it's the adverb that modifies everything, so that a hypothesis is "exactly right," or an experiment was "exactly done"—and that emphasis on precision has defined his career. His first major scientific advance was a by-product of necessity. It was 1995, and Miller had just started his lab at M.I.T. His research involved recording directly from neurons in the monkey brain, monitoring the flux of voltage within an individual cell as the animals performed various tasks. "There were machines that allowed you to record from eight or nine at the same time, but they were very expensive," Miller said. "I still had no grants, and there was no way I could afford one." So Miller began inventing his own apparatus in his spare time. After a few months of patient tinkering, he constructed a messy tangle of wires, steel screws, and electrodes that could simultaneously record from numerous cells, distributed across the brain. "It worked even better than the expensive machine," Miller said.

This methodological advance—it's known as multiple electrode recording—allowed Miller to ask a completely new kind of scientific question. For the first time, it was possible to see how cells in different brain areas interacted. Miller was most interested in the interactions of the prefrontal cortex. "You name the brain area, and the prefrontal cortex is almost certainly linked to it," he said. It took more than five years of painstaking probing, as Miller recorded from cells in the monkey brain, but he was eventually able to show that the prefrontal cortex wasn't simply an aggregator of information. Instead, it was like the conductor of an orchestra, waving its baton and directing the players. This is known as "top-down processing," since the prefrontal cortex (the "top" of the brain) is directly modulating the activity of other areas. This is why, during the focussing phase of the insight process, Jung-Beeman and Kounios saw activity in the prefrontal cortex and the neighboring anterior cingulate cortex. They were watching the conductor at work.



"Better use the ink wedge."

In 2001, Miller and Jonathan Cohen, a neuroscientist at Princeton, published an influential paper that laid out their theory of how, exactly, the prefrontal cortex controls the rest of the brain. According to Miller and Cohen, this brain area is responsible not only for focussing on the task at hand but for figuring out what other areas need to be engaged in order to solve a problem. One implication of this is that if we're trying to solve a verbal puzzle the prefrontal cortex will selectively activate the specific brain areas involved with verbal processing. If it decides to turn on parts of the right hemisphere, then we might end up with an insight; if it decides to restrict its search to the left hemisphere, we'll probably arrive at a solution incrementally or not at all.

This "integrative" theory of the prefrontal cortex suggests why we can instantly recognize the insight, even when it seems surprising: the brain has been concertedly pursuing the answer; we just didn't know it. "Your consciousness is very limited in capacity," Miller said, "and that's why your prefrontal cortex makes all these plans without telling you about it." When that obscure circuit in the right hemisphere finally generates the necessary association, the prefrontal cortex is able to identify it instantly, and the insight erupts into awareness. We suddenly notice the music that has been playing all along.

Because Miller can eavesdrop on neurons, he's been able to see how these insights operate at the cellular level. One of his current experiments involves showing monkeys different arrangements of dots and asking them to sort the arrangements into various categories that they have been taught. The monkeys guess randomly at first, learning from trial and error. "But then, at a certain point, the monkey just gets it," Miller said. "They just start being able to categorize arrangements of dots that they've never seen before. That's the moment of categorical insight." This primate epiphany registers as a new pattern of neural activity in the prefrontal cortex. The brain cells have been altered by the breakthrough. "An insight is a restructuring of information—it's seeing the same old thing in a completely new way," Miller said. "Once that restructuring occurs, you never go back."

And yet even this detailed explanation doesn't fully demystify insight. It remains unclear how simple cells recognize what the conscious mind cannot, or how they are able to filter through the chaos of bad ideas to produce the epiphany. "This mental process will always be a little unknowable, which is why it's so interesting to study," Jung-Beeman said. "At a certain point, you just have to admit that your brain knows much more than you do." An insight is a fleeting glimpse of the brain's huge store of unknown knowledge. The cortex is sharing one of its secrets.

So it was for Wag Dodge. After the fire crossed the river, all the other smoke jumpers were fixated on reaching the ridge. Panic had narrowed their thoughts, so that beating the flames up the slope was their sole goal. But, because Dodge realized that the fire would beat them to the top, his prefrontal cortex started frantically searching for an alternative. It was able to look past his fear and expand the possibilities of his thought process, as he considered remote mental associations that he'd never contemplated before. (As Miller says, "That Dodge guy had some really high prefrontal function.") And then, just as the blaze started to suck the oxygen out of the air, some remote bit of his brain realized that he could cheat death by starting his own fire. This unprecedented idea, a flicker of electricity somewhere in the right hemisphere, was immediately recognized as the solution the prefrontal cortex had been searching for. And so Dodge stopped running. He stood still as the wall of flame raced toward him. Then he lit the match. ♦

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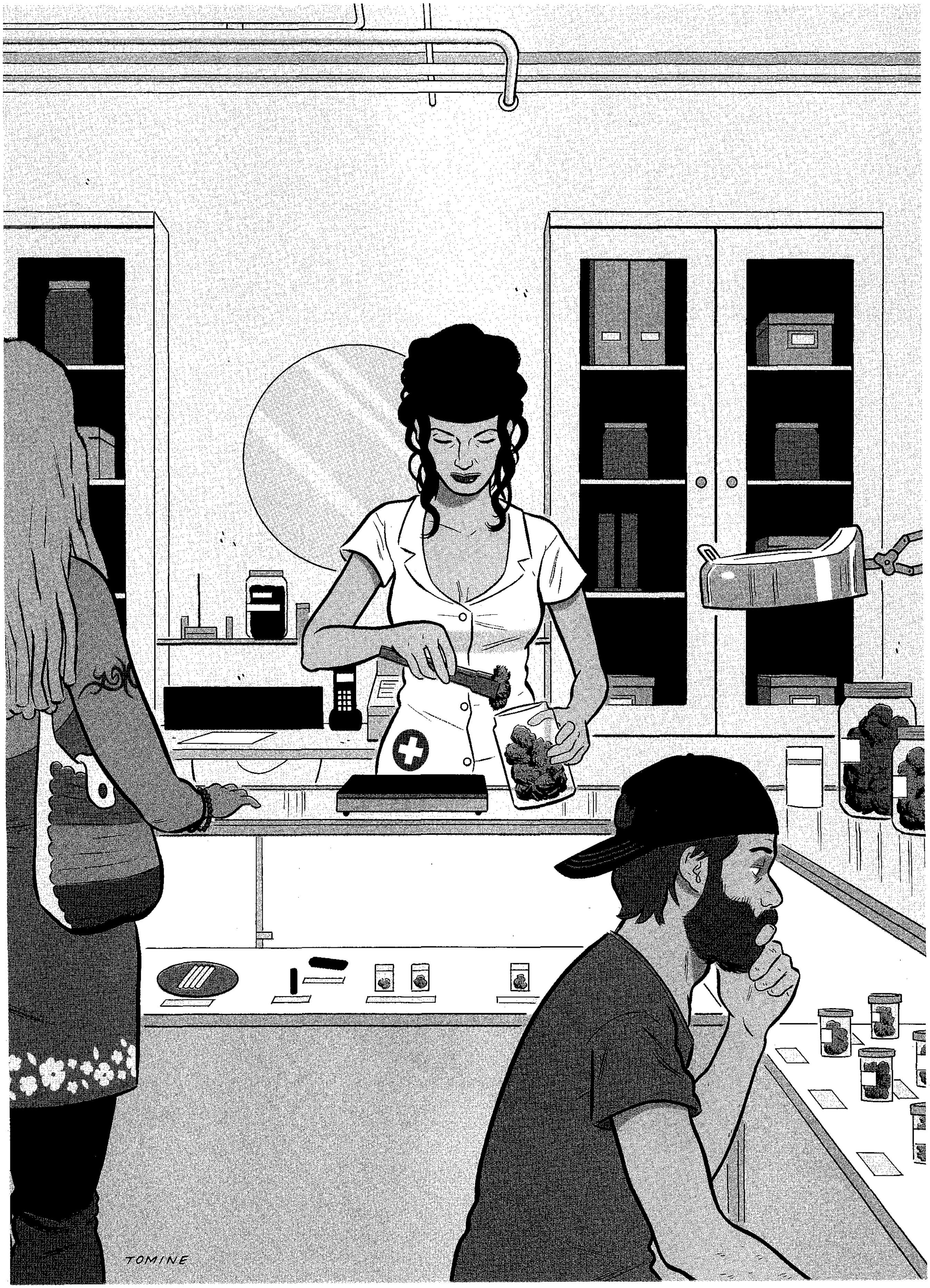


California now has more than two hundred thousand physician-sanctioned pot users and hundreds of dispensaries.

A REPORTER AT LARGE

DR. KUSH

How medical marijuana is transforming the pot industry.

BY DAVID SAMUELS

The Tibetan prayer flags suspended on a string over the sleeping body of Captain Blue rose and fell in fluttering counterpoint to the wheezy rhythm of his breath. Lifted by a gentle breeze off the Pacific Ocean, each swatch of red, white, yellow, or green cotton bore a paragraph of Asian script. Every time a flag flaps in the breeze, it is thought, a prayer flies off to Heaven. Blue's mother says that when her son was an infant he used to sleep until noon, which is still the time that he wakes up most days, on his platform bed in a one-bedroom apartment overlooking Venice Beach, a neighborhood of Los Angeles.

It was now three o'clock in the afternoon, and Captain Blue was dozing after a copious inhalation of purified marijuana vapor. (His nickname is an homage to his favorite variety of bud.) His hair was black and greasy, and was spread across his pillow. On the front of his purple T-shirt, which had slid up to expose his round belly, were the words "Big Daddy." With his arm wrapped around a three-foot-long green bong, he resembled a large, contented baby who has fallen asleep with his milk bottle.

Captain Blue is a pot broker. More precisely, he helps connect growers of high-grade marijuana upstate to the retail dispensaries that sell marijuana legally to Californians on a doctor's recommendation. Since 1996, when a referendum known as Proposition 215 was approved by California voters, it has been legal, under California state law, for authorized patients to possess or cultivate the drug. The proposition also allowed a grower to cultivate marijuana for a patient, as long as he had been designated a "primary caregiver" by that patient. Although much of the public discussion centered on the needs of patients with cancer, AIDS, and other diseases that are synonymous with extraordinary suffering, the language of the proposition was intentionally broad, covering any medical condition for which a licensed physician might judge marijuana to be an appropriate remedy—insomnia, say, or attention-deficit disorder.

The inside of Blue's apartment, where he spends most of his time, measures less than four hundred square feet. It opens onto a huge wraparound terrace that offers mind-bending views of the ocean and the Hollywood Hills. The apartment, which is in the vicinity of Washington Boulevard, used to be occupied by another pot dealer, who moved out a few years ago, leaving Blue with his crash pad and a list of about a hundred clients. The building is near Abbot Kinney Boulevard, the commercial drag in Venice that, in recent years, has been transformed from a low-rent strip of bars and secondhand-clothing stores into a destination for well-heeled shoppers and restaurant-goers. The building retains a funky seventies vibe, with white wood floors, murky brown walls, and faded Morrison Hotel-style carpets. The sounds of "Tom and Jerry" blare through locked doors in the middle of the day.

I recently spent six months, off and on, with Blue—at his apartment, in private homes, on farms, in pot grow rooms, and in other places where "medical marijuana" is produced, traded, sold, and consumed in California. During that time, I saw thousands of Tibetan prayer flags. The flags identify their owners with serenity and the conscious path, rather than with the sinister world of urban dope dealers, who flaunt muscles and guns, and charge exorbitant prices for mediocre product. For Blue and tens of thousands of like-minded individuals, Proposition 215 presented an opportunity to participate in a legally sanctioned experiment in altered living. The people I met in the high-end ganja business had an affinity for higher modes of thinking and being, including vegetarianism and eating organic food, practicing yoga, avoiding prescription drugs in favor of holistic healing methods, travelling to Indonesia and Thailand, fasting, and experimenting with hallucinogenic drugs. Many were also financially savvy, working long hours and making six-figure incomes.

Blue and I have known each other for almost two decades. Our fathers were both professors of political science, and, starting in the mid-eighties, we both attended Ivy League colleges in the Northeast, where we shared a fondness for illegal drugs. After graduation, Blue spun records and taught nursery school in Manhattan. He left for California in 1998, not long after the state banned cigarette smoking in workplaces—Blue is highly allergic to cigarette smoke—and passed Proposition 215. After working for a while as a bouncer, he began selling pot full time.

In 2003, the California State Legislature passed Senate Bill 420. The law was intended to clear up some of the confusion caused by Proposition 215, which had failed to specify how patients who could not grow their own pot were expected to obtain the drug, and how much pot could be cultivated for medical purposes. The law permitted any Californian with a doctor's note to own up to six mature marijuana plants, or to possess up to half a pound of processed weed, which could be obtained from a patients' collective or coöperative—terms that were not precisely defined in the statute. It also permitted a primary caregiver to be paid "reasonable compensation" for services provided to a qualified patient "to enable that person to use marijuana."

The counties of California were allowed to amend the state guidelines, and the result was a patchwork of rules and regulations. Upstate in Humboldt County, the heartland of high-grade marijuana farming in California, the district attorney, Paul Gallegos, decided that a resident could grow up to ninety-nine plants at a time, in a space of a hundred

ADRIAN TOMINE

square feet or less, on behalf of a qualified patient. The limited legal protections afforded to pot growers and dispensary owners have turned marijuana cultivation and distribution in California into a classic "gray area" business, like gambling or strip clubs, which are tolerated or not, to varying degrees, depending on where you live and on how aggressive your local sheriff is feeling that afternoon. This summer, Jerry Brown, the state's attorney general, plans to release a more consistent set of regulations on medical marijuana, but it is not clear that California's judges will uphold his effort. In May, the state Court of Appeal, in Los Angeles, ruled that Senate Bill 420's cap on the amount of marijuana a patient could possess was unconstitutional, because voters had not approved the limits.

Most researchers agree that the value of the U.S. marijuana crop has increased sharply since the mid-nineties, as California and twelve other states have passed medical-marijuana laws. A 2005 State Department report put the country's marijuana crop at more than twenty-two million pounds. A drug-policy analyst and activist named Jon Gettman recently published a report, based on federal-government statistics, estimating that between 1981 and 2006 domestic marijuana production increased tenfold, making pot the leading cash crop in America, displacing corn. Gettman calculated that in 2006 Californians grew more than twenty million pot plants, and that the street value of that crop alone might be as high as fourteen billion dollars.

According to Americans for Safe Access, which lobbies for medical marijuana, there are now more than two hundred thousand physician-sanctioned pot users in California. They acquire their medication from hundreds of dispensaries, collectives that are kept alive by the financial contributions of their patients, who pay cash for each quarter or eighth of an ounce of pot. The dispensaries also buy marijuana from their members, and sometimes directly from growers, whose crops can also be considered legal, depending on the size of the crop, the town where the plants are grown, and the disposition of the judge who hears the case.

California's encouragement of a licit market for pot has set off a low-level civil war with the federal government. Growing, selling, and smoking marijuana remain strictly illegal under federal law. The Drug Enforcement Administration, which maintains that marijuana poses a danger to users on a par with heroin and PCP, has kept up an energetic presence in the state, busting pot growers and dispensary owners with the coöperation of some local police departments.

In the past five years, an unwritten set of rules has emerged to govern Californians participating in the medical-marijuana trade. Federal authorities do not generally bother arresting patients or doctors who write prescriptions. Instead, the D.E.A. pressures landlords to evict dispensaries and stages periodic raids on them, either shutting them down or seizing their money and marijuana. Dispensary owners are rarely arrested, and patient records are usually left alone. Through trial and error, dispensary owners have learned how to avoid trouble: Don't advertise in newspapers, on billboards, or on flyers distributed door to door. Don't sell to minors or cops. Don't open more than two stores. Any Californian who is reasonably prudent can live a life centered on the cultivation, sale, and consumption of marijuana with little fear of being fined or going to jail.

Captain Blue displays his pot on a shelf by his bed, next to two new laptop computers and an assemblage of high-end stereo equipment. The weed is kept in silver Ziploc bags. All the pot that Blue sells is grown in accordance with California state law, he says, and is provided only to dispensaries of which Blue is a member, and to patients for whom he is the primary caregiver.

Blue has a photo I.D. card from the City of Los Angeles confirming that he is a bona-fide medical-marijuana patient. His malady is anxiety. On a side table by his bed, he keeps a Volcano, a German-made vaporizer that resembles a stainless-steel coffeemaker. The Volcano, which costs five hundred dollars, warms dried marijuana, releasing vapor into a plastic bag and leaving behind a toasted brown chaff that smells oddly like popcorn. When Blue uses the Volcano, he inhales the contents of the plastic bag through a bong, which purifies the vapor.

While Blue napped, I wandered around his apartment, and counted nearly a dozen images and carvings of the elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesha. The proliferation of Ganesha dates back to a well-publicized federal bust in January, 2007, when the D.E.A. seized the medicine and cash of eleven pot dispensaries in Los Angeles. The only major dispensary that wasn't busted had a Ganesha in its window. Now it is hard to find a karmically inclined ganja dealer in Los Angeles who doesn't own a herd of lucky figurines.

Blue's cell phone rang several times in succession, rousing him. His phone rings, on average, once every two and a half minutes between noon and 2 A.M., and I soon developed a Pavlovian aversion to his ringtone, a swirling, Middle Eastern-inflected electronica tune called "Lebanese Blonde." Blue switches phone numbers every six months or so. Although it is unlikely that the D.E.A. would tap his phone, he told me, it doesn't hurt to take simple precautions, if only to reassure his more paranoid clients.

Blue answered the phone, rubbed his eyes, and began rattling off numbers. "Three hundred fifty? Three-fifty? Three-twenty-five? We could do three-twenty-five," he said, quoting a final price per ounce. Assuming a sitting position on his bed, he punched numbers into a calculator and suggested some designer strains that his patient might enjoy.

"Try Sour Diesel," he told the client. "Take that and the Bubba Kush." In addition to Sour Diesel and Bubba Kush, which are grown indoors, he also had AK Mist, an outdoor strain; Jedi, which is brown and fuzzy; Purple Urkel, whose hue is suggested by its name; O.G. Kush and L.A. Confidential, two particularly potent strains; and Lavender, a fragrant purple grown up North. Modern Kush plants are derived from a strain that is said to have originated in the Hindu Kush mountains, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and, according to stoner lore, was imported to Southern California by some hippie surfers in the seventies, and then popularized in the late nineties by the Los Angeles rap group Cypress Hill. Stronger, better-tasting varieties of pot can sell for more than five thousand dollars per pound, more than double the price of average weed. The premium paid for designer pot creates a big incentive for growers and dealers to name their product for whatever strains happen to be fashionable that year. The variety of buds being sold as Kush has proliferated to the point where even the most catholic-minded botanist would be hard pressed to identify a common plant ancestor.

Only a small percentage of consumer marijuana sales in California occur within the medical-marijuana market. Even so, the dispensaries, by serving as a gold standard for producers and consumers, have fuelled the popularity of high-end strains in much the same way that the popularity of the Whole Foods grocery chain has brought heirloom lettuce to ordinary supermarkets. To serve these sophisticated new consumers, growers in California and elsewhere are producing hundreds of exotic new strains, whose effects are more varied, subtle, and powerful than the street-level pot available to tokers in the nineteen-seventies and eighties.

"Does Terrence have paperwork with him?" Blue asked the customer. From the living room, I could hear the hum of the Volcano and the crinkle of the expanding plastic bag. The vapor in the bag was Gush, a robust mixture of Goo—a lighter, giddier high—and Kush.

Blue's business consists mainly of selling a few pounds a week to various dispensaries; occasionally, though, a single outlet will buy five or more pounds at a time. In the course of a month, Blue is typically in debt to half a dozen people, and in turn holds markers for twenty to thirty thousand dollars that he is owed by distributors around town. Because Blue works only with people he trusts, he usually gets his money back, although it can take as long as two or three years for some debtors to make good. Understanding the abstractions of ganja credit and debt is important in the pot business, where financial success is determined largely by the velocity of your cash transactions. A practiced flipper like Blue can make twenty to thirty dollars on an eighth of an ounce of high-grade pot, which retails for anywhere between fifty and seventy-five dollars. Last year, Blue made roughly a hundred thousand dollars, and paid some ten thousand in taxes.

Later in the afternoon, a friend of Blue's, who calls herself Lily, showed up with a duffelbag. She unzipped the bag and placed on Blue's kitchen table three black trash bags filled with ganja. Lily is a courier; she transports pot to Los Angeles from the growing regions upstate. A witchy Japanese-American girl with a dolphin tattoo on her right shoulder, she wore large gold hoop earrings, a Lucite cross necklace, and sunglasses perched on top of her hair. She said that she got into the business because she suffers from chronic back and neck pain from a spinal injury, and found that smoking weed helped her with symptoms such as nausea and a loss of appetite.

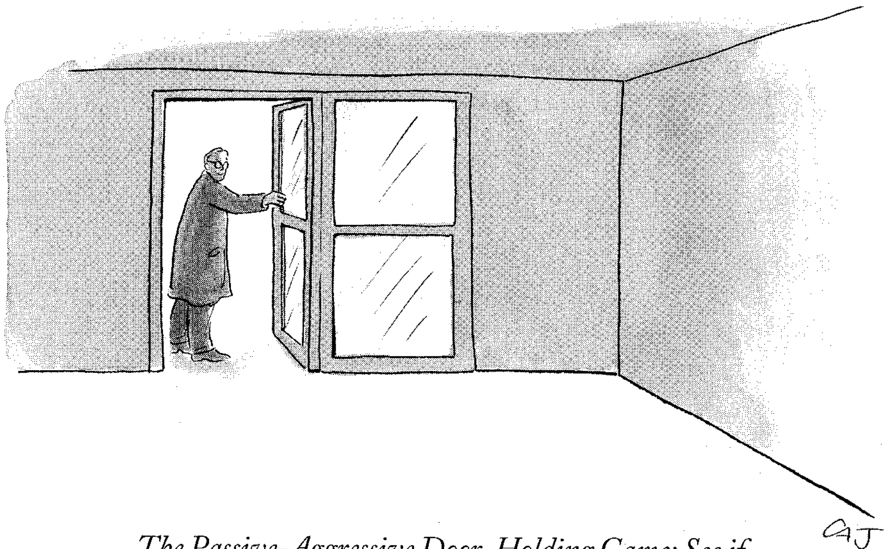
Captain Blue encourages the growers he deals with to stay within legal cultivation limits, and makes sure that the dispensaries he joins keep the doctor's recommendations of members on file. The only participants in Blue's transactions whose activities are not strictly covered by prevailing interpretations of state law are couriers, or mules, who usually transport marijuana in airtight containers in the trunk, seats, or tires of a car. Neither Proposition 215 nor Senate Bill 420 spelled out how medical marijuana should be transported from rural growers to urban patients, leaving the mules as the least protected link in the distribution chain. Once the mules reach Los Angeles, they make the rounds of middlemen like Blue, who can legally broker their product to dispensaries where they are members. Mules receive a cut that ranges from five to sixteen per cent of the purchase price.

Being a courier was risky, Lily said, but the pay was good enough to let her not work for half the year. Her methods of transporting the pot from Northern California to Blue's apartment were time-tested and low-tech. You get the largest garbage bags you can find, some food bags, and a vacuum sealer. Then you double- or triple-bag the pot, seal it, pack it in garbage bags, put the bags inside some old newspapers, and stuff the bags into some cheap knapsacks, and then put three knapsacks each into duffelbags, along with a few hockey gloves or soccer balls. Then you pack the duffelbags in the back of the trunk and throw an old blanket over them, and toss on top a few folding chairs, along with some grocery bags full of fresh organic apples, to mask the scent of pot.

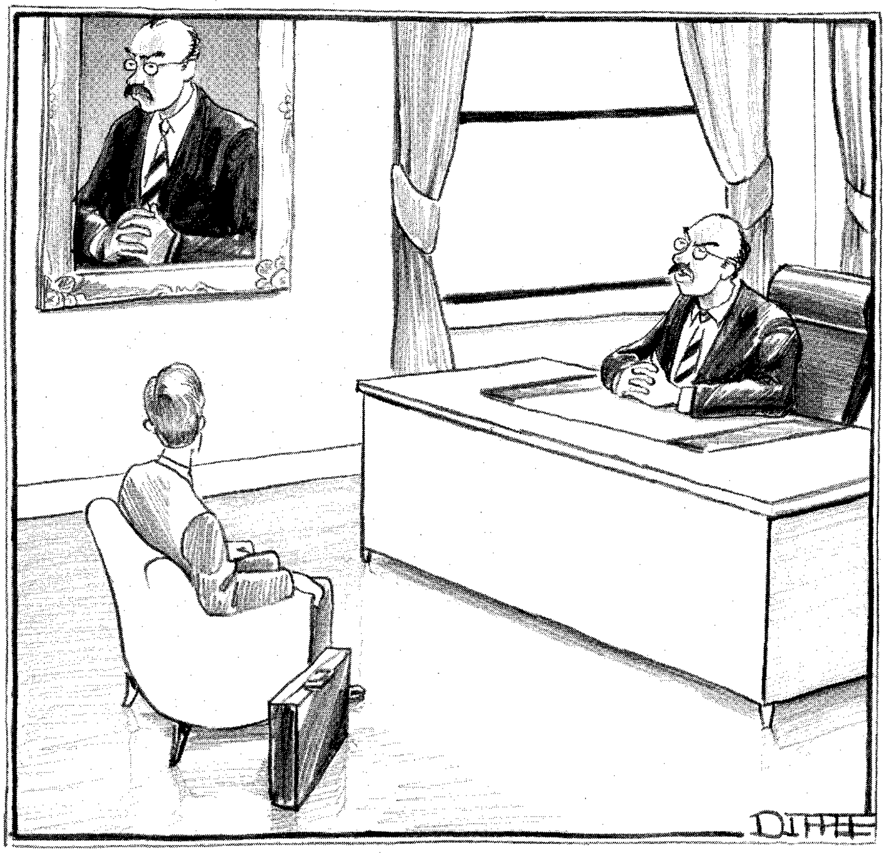
Blue, having assessed Lily's stash, made his offer for a portion. "Six thousand," he said.

One day, Blue and I went for a drive up the Pacific Coast Highway, in his blue hybrid S.U.V. I watched him make more than a thousand dollars in under an hour, dealing on the phone. "I've got some tasty L.A. Confidential," he told a customer, motioning me to extract a disk of trance music from a pile of stale laundry in the back seat. "It's like O.G. Kush. A pound? I think I can do that." Blue said that he sells pot solely for medical purposes, although he conceded the possibility that some clients might break their purchases down into smaller amounts for the street trade. Asking questions about what buyers intend to do with their pot is not friendly behavior, Blue explained with a smile.

We were headed up to Topanga Canyon, in the mountains near Malibu, to meet a broker who supplies Blue with



The Passive-Aggressive Door-Holding Game: See if you can make an innocent stranger hurry from more than fifteen feet away while you hold the door.



"It helps me stay focussed on what matters most."

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some of the best weed in the state. I'll call him Guthrie. A lifelong resident of Humboldt County, he funds a number of growing operations, ranging from a large underground bunker to smaller outdoor plots of fewer than a hundred plants. He also uses a fat bankroll to buy product from other producers, which he takes to Los Angeles two or three times a month. The house in Topanga, an old hippie enclave, belonged to a friend who let Guthrie sleep outside in a blue-and-green tent that resembled one of Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes. I ducked to avoid a string of Tibetan prayer flags that hung over the entrance.

Guthrie was a lean, healthy-looking, brown-eyed man in his mid-thirties. "We have a list of all the pot growers in Humboldt County," he said, repeating an old Northern joke for my benefit. "It's called the Yellow Pages." He reached beneath a table and handed Blue a large black trash bag. Blue untied the bag and stuck his head inside, as the rich aroma of Purple Kush filled the interior of the tent.

"Mmm," Blue said, inhaling. Purple Kush smells like a mixture of cardamom and cloves, with a darker, earthier undertone of dried peat moss, and an acidic top note evoking freshly ground coffee. The two men agreed on a figure of forty-four hundred dollars a pound; the price had eased somewhat since its peak, in 2005. A large number of new growers entering the market had nudged prices down.

Guthrie's parents had been hippies. Growing up in Humboldt, he and his siblings got used to fleeing their house in the middle of the night when D.E.A. helicopters raided his family's growing patch. Perhaps a quarter of the kids in his class had parents involved in the marijuana trade. "You'd say, 'My dad, he fixes our house a lot,' " Guthrie recalled with a laugh, as he offered me a loaded pipe. By the end of the summer, the family was usually broke. In October, the harvest would come, and the family would sell their crop and have a great Christmas; by the next summer, they'd be back in a jam.

Guthrie stayed out of the family business until he was twenty-seven. Then he obtained a trucker's license and began hauling propane. Since truckers who transport hazardous materials are professional drivers who must go through background checks, the police generally leave them alone once they show their license, whether they are driving a truck or not. Guthrie's trucker's license gave his family a free pass through the "gantlet"—a stretch of Highway 101 between Humboldt and Santa Rosa where state police routinely search cars for pot.

Guthrie said that the quasi-legal status of smaller growing arrangements, combined with consumers' preference for potent, high-maintenance weed, has shifted the balance of the pot business away from large-scale farms. "There's a lot more people doing little scenes," he said. The welter of laws pertaining to medical marijuana in California has offered careful operators like Guthrie the best of both worlds: prosecution for growing and selling has become much less likely, while federal busts and seizures keep prices high. Guthrie sells about ten per cent of his product to dispensaries and collectives. Starting up a sophisticated indoor farming operation costs about three hundred thousand dollars, he said, including the cost of making a building airtight—to lock in the humidity, and to keep passersby from smelling the pot and calling the cops—and fitting it with thousand-watt grow lights.

Guthrie grows his plants in octagons, a hydroponic arrangement that allows producers to maximize the number of plants in a confined space. The cost of a piece of property upstate can run an additional three hundred thousand to one and a half million dollars, he said. After a few years, if you know what you are doing, you can make your investment back, and then you can pay a sharecropper to run your operation and spend your time travelling. Guthrie told Blue that he would soon be heading to Indonesia. "It's amazing over there," he said. The last time he was in Java, he recalled, he stayed in a Muslim village near the beach, and found the people generally relaxed and welcoming, if somewhat hostile to the Western habit of lying in the sun without clothing.

Life was good, he said; the only problem was that too many other people wanted the same life. Most people who moved up North to become pot entrepreneurs fucked it up, he said. Their failures, however, did nothing to diminish the potency of the dream.

One of Captain Blue's regular marijuana customers was a dispensary in Venice Beach. The store, which has cement floors, a glass display case, and a couch the color of aluminum, looks like a cross between a photographer's loft and a Kiehl's boutique. When I last visited, large Mason jars in the display case were filled with designer strains of weed selected by the owner, Cindy 99, whose nickname refers to a variety of designer pot. In a refrigerator, and marked "For medicinal use only," were treats such as marijuana granola and marijuana milk chocolate with crispy wafers. Above the counter hung a notice: "To our valued patients: in accordance with California law, we are required to add 8.25% sales tax."

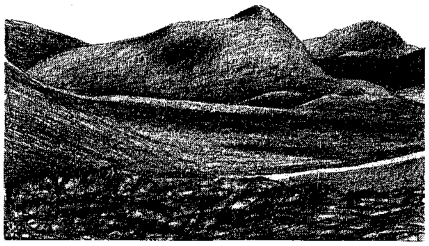
Cindy 99's employees included a receptionist, a full-time counter girl, a part-time counter girl, and a bonded security guard—a former Green Beret—who is licensed to carry a weapon. Dr. Dean, a local physician, saw aspiring patients at the dispensary once a week. As long as they had a California state I.D., those who received recommendations for marijuana could buy some immediately from the dispensary's stock. Cindy told me that when she opened her shop, in 2007, she needed the same licenses that she would have needed to open a newsstand on the Santa Monica Pier: a commercial lease, a seller's permit, a federal tax I.D. number, and a tobacco license (for selling rolling papers and pipes). She estimated that forty per cent of her clients suffer from serious illnesses such as cancer, AIDS, glaucoma, epilepsy, and M.S. The rest have ailments like anxiety, sleeplessness, A.D.D., and assorted pains.

Like many other dispensary owners I spoke with, Cindy derives particular satisfaction from providing medication to people who suffer from chronic diseases. Although she suspects that there is nothing seriously wrong with many of the young men who come in to buy an eighth of L.A. Confidential, she doesn't regard marijuana as a harmful drug when compared with Xanax, Valium, Prozac, and other pills that are commonly prescribed by physicians to treat vague complaints of anxiety or dysphoria. It was easy to see why the dispensary was so popular with young men: there was good pot, and Cindy 99, who is in her thirties, looks like an adolescent boy's fantasy of his best friend's hot older sister. The day I was there, she wore a tight sleeveless blue T-shirt with a gilt-winged emblem of a flying horse.

The first customer of the day was a Hispanic guy with three tattoos, the biggest one of which read "Angeles del Inferno." He had a doctor's note on file. After a short discussion, Cindy recommended two strains, which cost sixty-five dollars for an eighth. "These two have sativa in them," she said. "They're really good for daytime use." All strains of pot sold in the United States are derived from two varieties of the plant—indica and sativa—which have discernibly different effects on the user. Indica is a heavier, numbing drug; sativa is better for doing creative work or listening to music. Cindy refers to a popular book called "The Big Book of Buds" to determine the precise balance of indica and sativa in the strains she sells. Purple Urkel, Cindy explained, was mostly indica, making it better for alleviating pain. "The percentages are arbitrary, because of all the cross-breeding," Cindy admitted to me. "You take a Blueberry and you cross it with a Kush and you go back into Trainwreck, and how do you get a percentage from that?"

A young white man, barely out of his teens, with lace-up black boots, a nubby backpack, and a goatee, came in and bought an eighth of Trainwreck. He selected a chocolate turtle from the edibles case while gazing shyly at Cindy. "Don't eat it all at once if you have anything to do," she warned him.

Cindy has been in the ganja business for seventeen years, her entire adult life. Both of her parents grow pot. She began selling weed in high school, in British Columbia, where enforcement of anti-marijuana laws was famously lax. One day, a friend asked her if she would help distribute what his mom had grown. Within six weeks, they had doubled their money. "We started bringing it from Canada down to California," she recalled. "And then we moved to snowmobiles and then hollow-panelled speedboats on trailers, and then semis and shadow-planes. A plane would go up in the States and another plane would go up in Canada, and they'd fly around as if they were sightseeing, and you're allowed to switch airspace as long as you don't land. And then they would land in each other's countries looking like each other, same serial number, same everything."



A patio in back of the shop had been set up with a white plastic table with a batik tablecloth and two plastic chairs, in preparation for Dr. Dean's weekly visit. Each prospective patient pays the Doctor a hundred and fifty dollars, in cash, for a diagnostic interview. Dr. Dean's full name is Dr. Dean Hillel Weiss. Forty years old, he is one of a few dozen doctors in Los Angeles who regularly write medical-marijuana recommendations. In the past few years, he said, he had written several thousand such letters, none of which had been successfully challenged in court.

I told Dean that I wanted a doctor's recommendation that would allow me to legally smoke pot. He began a fifteen-minute interview, asking me about my reasons for wanting the drug. "How long have you been under the care of a psychiatrist?" he asked me, writing down the answer on a notepad. I provided him with a bill from my psychiatrist in New York, along with proof that I was currently living in California. He then quizzed me about my brief and unsatisfactory experiences with prescription medications for anxiety and depression, and my history of illegal drug use. Deciding that I was a suitable candidate for a medical-marijuana recommendation, Dr. Dean took my money and provided me with a quick tutorial on strains of pot—indica offered a "body high," whereas sativa was "more heady and abstract"—along with a signed letter certifying that I was a patient under his care. The letter was good for a year, after which I could renew it, for a hundred dollars.

So far that day, Dr. Dean had seen seven patients, including a former doorman at a Manhattan night club, a musician working on a Bob Marley tribute album, and a young woman named Cassandra who was in the publishing business and came armed with a purse full of prescription medications for anxiety and depression. The vast majority of his referrals, he said, were by word of mouth. Though he was always careful to observe the letter of California state law, he said, "My personal belief is that marijuana is a useful and relatively harmless substance and that adults should be free to choose whether they want to use it or not."

Dean graduated from Columbia University and SUNY Downstate Medical Center, and began an orthopedics residency in his home town of Detroit before moving to Los Angeles, in 1998, and becoming an emergency-room doctor at Martin Luther King, Jr./Drew Medical Center—known to locals as Killer King. By 2005, he was burned out. One day, a friend invited him over to his house to sample some marijuana that he had obtained from his fiancée's boss, who had a recommendation for pot. "My friend said, 'I've got six strains you've got to try. I've got lollipops, I've got brownies,' " Dr. Dean recalled. "I went over. It was like being in Amsterdam. At the end of the night, he turned to me and said, 'You know, you hate working in the emergency room. Maybe you should look into this.' "

Cassandra, the publishing employee, was interviewed by Dr. Dean after I was. Emerging from the patio, she said, "That was amazing! That was fantastic!" She went over to the display case.

"What's the best in terms of social life, having other people around?" she asked. As Cindy discussed the relative merits of the various sativa strains, Cassandra noticed some small hash pipes in the glass case.

"It's a great little travel device that you can take to the beach," Cindy explained.

"No way! Cool! I love it!" Cassandra said. She bought one.

As Cindy weighed out Cassandra's marijuana purchases, which totalled a hundred and ten dollars, she commiserated with her new customer about the unattractive names of some popular strains. "Cat Piss?" she said. "Dog Shit? If it's going to be legal, the stoners can't still be making up the names."

The Farmacy, which has outlets in West Hollywood, Venice, and Westwood, made Cindy 99's dispensary look like a mom-and-pop operation. Famous for the "Very Open" neon sign in the window of the West Hollywood location, the Farmacy has the carefully art-designed "natural" aesthetic of an Aveda boutique. The reigning concept is that pot is simply another benign medicinal herb, like echinacea or ginkgo biloba. The Farmacy is the brainchild of Michael, an elusive hippie who doesn't give out his last name and whose defiant nature and marketing prowess have made him a celebrity on the medical-marijuana scene. His success has begun to irritate the authorities: the D.E.A. recently forced the Farmacy's landlord to close a fourth outlet, in Santa Monica.

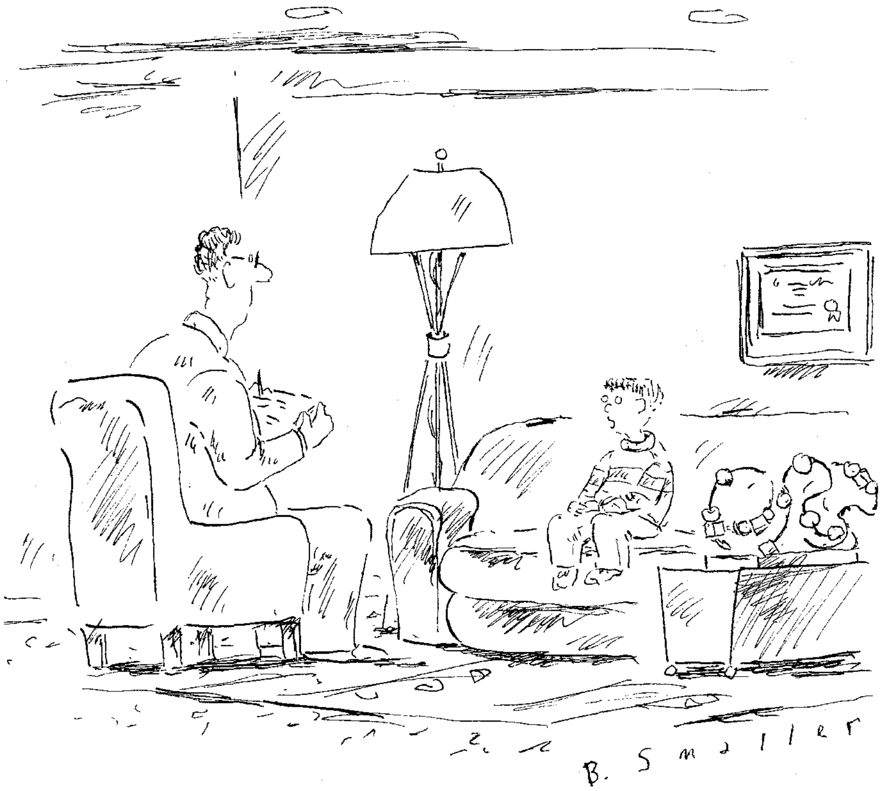
I met Michael one afternoon at the Venice store, a large retail space on Abbot Kinney. In the front of the shop, Asian handicrafts are for sale. Saint-John's-wort and various Chinese herbs are stocked in jars behind the main counter; a forty-two-inch plasma TV screen displays Tao symbols and other karmic imagery. An extensive selection of organic soaps and shampoos is available in the back of the store, near a children's-medicine section. The main sign that the Farmacy is not, in fact, a Body Shop is a large color portrait on the wall of Bob Marley, smiling broadly while toking on a fat spliff.

Customers with a valid doctor's letter may request one of the bamboo-bound menus kept behind the counter, which list available strains of pot, some of them requiring a "donation" of seventy-five dollars per gram. There is also a gelato bar, which offers a variety of flavors laced with marijuana and other herbs.

Michael, a sixty-year-old man with a gray ponytail, was wearing jeans, a faded navy T-shirt, a yellow flannel shirt, and a battered fleece vest. Shifting impatiently from one foot to the other, he read from a poster on the wall stating that words and phrases like "weed," "dope," and "getting stoned" were used to "devalue, disempower, and criminalize people who choose to use medical cannabis." Recently, he noted, characters on "Desperate Housewives" had used the words "medicine" and "medicating" while referring to cannabis consumption. The culture was changing. "We see cannabis as a gateway herb," he said.

Upstairs, he showed me a light-filled waiting room with a grand piano and handcrafted wood chairs and couches. Someday soon, he said, the room would be filled with patients waiting to meet

"Was that your first foray into politics?"



"I'm an oldest child trapped in the body of a middle child."

with therapists practicing massage, acupuncture, and other healing arts. Licensed professionals would be available to consult about medication, diet, and exercise. The waiting room was even equipped with children's toys, so that mothers could bring their kids to appointments. As we spoke, he trimmed some long-stemmed flowers that were in a vase on top of the piano. He then sat down and played a passage of Brahms.

Michael had trouble sitting in one place for any length of time, a legacy, in part, of five and a half years he says he spent in San Quentin for various pot-related offenses. (Spending years in a small, cramped prison cell had made him antsy, he said.) Michael has been involved in the marijuana business since he was eighteen years old. His first big deal, with an Arab partner, was smuggling into California two hundred pounds of hash from Lebanon. In the early seventies, he attended a pot-legalization rally in Washington, D.C. While in the city, he did some research on cannabis at the Library of Congress. He found a trove of cannabis studies from the early twentieth century; botanists at the time had studied the plant extensively. According to a paper from 1903, the internal clock that tells a marijuana plant whether to flower or not could be turned on or off by varying its exposure to light. By lengthening the "day" to sixteen or eighteen hours, growers could speed up the initial growth of the plants; later in the growing cycle, they could cut back on light exposure, causing female plants to flower. The useless male plants, which produce pollen rather than smokable buds, could then be thrown away.

By speeding up the growing cycle and getting rid of the males, you could produce three or four times the amount of pot indoors. In the winter of 1973, Michael, who was living in Mendocino County, put together a slide show for upstate growers based on what he had learned about manipulating the growing cycle. "Nobody ever grew males again," he boasted.

Michael said that he served two stints in San Quentin. After he was discharged the second time, in 1999, he grew tomatoes for Whole Foods and worked for a seed bank. After the passage of Senate Bill 420, a friend told him about the dispensary scene and loaned him a 1987 BMW. Michael placed an ad in the newspaper saying that he would deliver cannabis right to a customer's door. He opened the first Farmacy in 2005.

I asked Michael if being involved in the dispensary business was a wise choice for a two-time drug offender. "I've got two strikes around my neck, and, yes, I've been anxious," he said. He noted that he had ten children from various wives and girlfriends, all of whom were supported by the income from his stores. He declined to reveal how much money he made.

Michael jumped off the couch and bounded downstairs to take care of some business, leaving me with JoAnna LaForce, who helps run the business side of the Farmacy. A cheerful woman in her fifties, she believes that she is the only pharmacist in the United States who actively participates in a medical-cannabis dispensary. Though doctors are protected under California state law, she explained, pharmacists are not, which means that she is theoretically subject to arrest, although the D.E.A. generally avoids entanglements with medical professionals.

LaForce told me that she had once been married to Michael; they did not have children. "I met him in San Diego in February, 1993, through a mutual friend," she said. "At the time, he was on the lam. We were together for a year before the feds took him away." When he got out of prison, they were together for two more years, and then he went to Mexico, to live on the beach and surf. When Michael decided to open the Farmacy, she was happy to help.

LaForce spent fifteen years working in a hospice with dying patients. "I saw the value of alternative medicine, particularly cannabis, in helping with appetite, pain management, and anxiety," she said. "I found that I could use cannabis to decrease the pain medication, which in turn made patients able to spend their last days talking to their friends, spouses, to share good times." The upcoming pot harvest, she said, was set to be the largest in the state's history, adding, "There is a gold rush going on with cannabis in the state of California."

The dispensary owners of Los Angeles hold a meeting once a month in an anonymous office building in the shadow of Cedars-Sinai hospital. At a recent gathering, a sign on the wall said "Stop

Arresting Medical Marijuana Patients." The shades were drawn. There were twenty-five people in attendance, and most of them were either in their mid-twenties or in their mid-forties. A few—such as a muscular man in biker gear and a woman in glittery flip-flops and not much else—looked like refugees from the porn industry.

The meeting began with a "raid update," delivered by Chris Fusco, a young field coördinator for Americans for Safe Access. In the past month alone, ten dispensaries had been raided in Los Angeles by the D.E.A. "Raids suck," Fusco said.

"I think things will get worse before they get better," said Don Duncan, the owner of the California Patients Group, a large dispensary that was raided by the D.E.A., and then shut down, in the summer of 2007. He owns another dispensary, the Los Angeles Caregivers and Patients Group, which was raided a few months later but has subsequently reopened, despite the rumored seizure of close to a million dollars in marijuana. (Duncan puts the figure at thirteen thousand dollars' worth of cannabis-based products.)

Several of the top dispensary owners had recently attended meetings with the city planning department, the city attorney, and the L.A.P.D. The meetings were intended to help draft a set of legal guidelines to govern the conduct of the dispensaries. Despite the dispensary owners' willingness to coöperate with the city, Duncan said, everyone who attended the meetings had either had his dispensary raided by the D.E.A. or received a letter from his landlord asking him to give up his lease, owing to threats from federal authorities that the property would be seized.

"What is the information that the D.E.A. wants from the people they detain in these raids?" a man asked.

"They want to know who is in charge and where the medicine comes from," Duncan answered. "They want growers." Patient records were untouched. "They left all the concentrates," he added, describing the aftermath of the raid on the Los Angeles Caregivers and Patients Group. "That's how we reopened the vapor bar."

"Did they take computers?" another person asked.

"They planted some tracking software that records user names and passwords which was transmitting to an I.P. address in Virginia," Duncan said. "Our computer guy found it right away."

After the meeting, I paid a visit to Allison Margolin, who calls herself "L.A.'s dopest attorney." Her trade is a sort of family business—her father, the lawyer Bruce Margolin, is the author of the Margolin Guide, which enumerates the legal penalties for the sale and possession of pot in each of the fifty states. She works in a black-glass office tower on Wilshire Boulevard owned by Larry Flynt, the publisher of *Hustler*. On the walls in her office, a Harvard Law School degree is juxtaposed with a pictorial layout from the magazine *Skunk*, featuring her in a low-cut leopard-print dress. Margolin's sexpot image is an advantage with clients, who, more often than not, are socially isolated men. Margolin has a reputation for getting cases dismissed, and for retrieving marijuana plants that have been seized by the police.

"The truth is, it's very rare to get plants back," Margolin said. Her long auburn hair was in a tidy French bun, but a few strands had been allowed to slip loose. Like many of her clients, she adopted a tone of adolescent vulnerability and outraged innocence when talking about the

NEVER MIND

Never mind the pins
And needles I am on.
Let all the other instruments
Of torture have their way.
While air-conditioners
Froze my coffee
I caught the toaster
Eating my toast.
Did I press the right
Buttons on all these
Buttonless surfaces,
Daring me to press them?
Did you gasp on seeing what
The mailman just brought?

Will the fellow I saw pedalling
Across the bridge live long
After losing his left leg,
His penis, and his bike
To fearlessness?
Will his sad wife find
Consolation with the
Computer wizard called in
Last year to deal with glitches?

Did you defuse the boys'
Bomb before your house
Was under water, same
As everything else?
My sister grabbed her
Silver hand mirror
Before floating away.
The dog yelped constantly,
Tipping our canoe.
Silly dog.

—*Dorothea Tanning*

mean grownups who don't like pot. "People are talking about how it's being over-recommended and abused," she said. "I mean, big fucking deal. It's not toxic!" I asked her if she had a doctor's letter, and she nodded vigorously, explaining that she suffers from an anxiety disorder.

She said that courts are sometimes sympathetic to her arguments about the relative safety of pot, but most judges and prosecutors seem to have only a glancing acquaintance with the case law since the passage of Proposition 215. "I've gone to court, like, several times where the judge has read only the first half of the case, which talks about how dispensaries are not legal according to Proposition 215," she said. "I think it's just intellectual and physical laziness."

A patient whose plants Margolin had recovered, Matt Farrell—known in the community as Medical Matt—stopped by for some counsel. Medical Matt was hardly an advertisement for the curative wonders of medical marijuana, or for the idea that all medical-marijuana patients are enjoying themselves by gaming the system. His cheeks and chin were covered in a three-day growth of dark stubble, and his red-rimmed eyes got wet as he spoke.

"I've always suffered from mental problems," Farrell said, reciting a long list of prescription drugs that he had taken, including Paxil, Wellbutrin, Risperdal, and Prozac. He had obtained his first doctor's letter for pot in late 2001 or early 2002—his memory wasn't clear. He began growing pot to support his habit, which costs him between sixty and a hundred dollars a day.

In December, 2005, he said, police officers ransacked his house—seizing about a hundred and twenty plants and nine grow lights—even though he showed his doctor's letter, and contended that the plants were for his own use and the use of the members of the collective to which he belonged. He was accused of unlawfully cultivating marijuana; the charge was dismissed in 2006. The police came back to his house in 2007, he said, once again trashing the premises and charging him with the unlawful cultivation of marijuana and the possession of marijuana for sale. They froze his bank account, which, he said, destroyed his credit rating. The second case against him is still pending.

Although the police behavior he described may seem excessive, it is usually forgiven by judges who try to balance the competing demands of state and federal law. By routinely looking the other way when law-enforcement officers make "mistakes," the courts have allowed police departments that don't like current state law to work around it, and put pressure on people like Farrell.

In the wake of the seizures and the property damage, Farrell said, he was borrowing money from his parents, and his house was going into foreclosure. "It's either a joke or I'm delirious," he said, starting to cry. "I mean, I'm not the smartest person in the world, but I sure as hell can read something pretty simple and understand it. If the state, county, city council, and everybody else is saying you can, how the hell does the L.A.P.D. come in to say you can't?" Spokesmen and officers of the D.E.A. and the L.A.P.D. told me, off the record, that the federal laws regulating the possession and distribution of marijuana took precedence over the laws of the State of California, and that, until federal law changed, the D.E.A. and the L.A.P.D. would continue to work together in their fight against the drug trade.

Sitting beneath a willow tree on a breezy day in Sonoma County, you can see why the idea of leaving the city behind and growing your own weed exerts such a pull on the holistic health nuts, masseurs, d.j.s, art-school dropouts, and New Age types who populate the medical-marijuana scene in Los Angeles. Farming a crop of twenty-five or thirty plants of killer weed is an updated (and highly profitable) version of the age-old California dream of an orange tree in every back yard. For those who can't afford to pay for a prime plot of land in Humboldt, there is the possibility of renting a small split-level house in Sonoma or Mendocino and converting the master bedroom into a grow room, where you can turn around an indoor crop every sixty days.

Captain Blue and I took a five-day excursion to the growing fields up North.

Our guide was an old friend of his, a woman who called herself the Kid. She had been minding a grow house in Sonoma since being laid up with a half-dozen broken ribs after a bad motorcycle accident. The Kid had large eyes, a big nose, and long hair, and a squat, powerful body covered in black-ink tattoos, which ran across her chest and arms and up the back of her neck. "There's a lot of women in the bud scene that are just looking to be with some guy that has some property and some plants, so that they can sit on their ass and do nothing," she said, as we sat outside on her porch and watched horses graze. "There is a large percentage of really fabulous beauties. And then there's the hard, serious worker girls that dig holes all day."

Blue wiped the sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his loose plaid shirt. He wasn't used to being outside. He asked for a glass of water and drank it in a single gulp. Then he wrapped his arms around his friend and gave her a hug, taking care not to put pressure on her ribs. They made for a weird, medieval-looking couple; both had long hair, round bodies, and shoulders strong enough to chop wood. Both had spent years smoking pot and consuming staggering quantities of mushrooms, cactus powders, LSD, and other mind-altering substances.

The Kid made her bed by the picture window in the living room, next to a plaster Buddha and a shelf of books about plants, including "Marijuana Horticulture," by Jorge Cervantes. The dining room was occupied by a pool table. If you are selling your own product, she explained, you can clear as much as seventy-five thousand dollars, after expenses, on a duffelbag filled with thirty pounds of pot. The easiest way to make this kind of small indoor scene work is to live in someone else's house and nurture the plants in exchange for a third or half the profits, and that is how the Kid would be spending her time for the next two months.

The Kid's plants, all Sour Diesels, were being raised on a mixture of nutrients which changed every three to five days, in accordance with a detailed regimen that had been laid out, in black Magic Marker, in a battered spiral-bound notebook. The notebook had been bequeathed to the Kid by a longtime friend. The cost of the nutrients was approximately six hundred dollars a week.

We entered the darkened bedroom, and were confronted by the fetid smell of plant life. Without the ventilation system that the Kid had installed, the temperature would have been about a hundred and ten degrees in the dark, largely from the stored-up heat of the lights—seven of them, a thousand watts each. There was a tank of carbon dioxide in the corner. "The more CO_2, the thicker the bud," the Kid explained.

It was a relatively small operation: the lights and their installation had cost about fifteen thousand dollars, and power and nutrients had cost an additional twelve thousand or so. The array of nutrients along the walls included specialized growing products such as Bud Blood ("promotes larger, heavier & denser flowers and fruit") and Rizotonic (a powerful root stimulant). "Voodoo Juice is going to go in here, and Scorpion, and it goes on and on," the Kid said. Every three or four days, she ran purified water through her hydroponic growing medium for a full day, in order to give the plants a break. After the full, eight-week growth cycle, the Kid planned to harvest her crop and clear out.

Up North, the marijuana harvest is known as "trimming season." In Humboldt and Mendocino, she said, October is a monthlong sleepover, with all the free ganja, beer, and organic food you want. A really good trimmer can trim two pounds of pot a day, at a rate of two hundred and fifty dollars per pound, while sitting around a table with three or four friends. Kids from San Francisco or even Australia hear about the harvest from friends of friends and show up for the pot and the cash. The D.E.A. routinely busts a few big scenes each year, and the local police have been known to stop cars and check the passengers for telltale scratches on their arms or sticky resin under their fingernails.

None of this intimidated the Kid. "It's a fucking blast," she said. "This is crop No. 6 for me this year." After a month of being cooped up, she was eager to get on the road. I agreed to drive, because her license had been suspended since the motorcycle accident. Along the way, she recounted a transformative experience that she had had at the age of nineteen with the psychedelic drug DMT. While tripping, she had a vision of herself lying down on a forest floor. She heard a growling sound and saw a twenty-foot-tall woman guarded by a gigantic dog. "She was enormous, and definitely not attractive, and I recognized the look in her eye," the Kid remembered. "I said, 'Oh, my God, that's me.' And she said, 'Yep, I am you. But I'm very old. My energy is very big.' I was kind of in shock, but I didn't feel threatened." The old woman explained that the Kid didn't need to worry about death anymore. There was no such thing as death, in fact. Energy returned to its source and then took another form.

The Kid fell silent for a moment. "I only saw her that one time," she said. Afterward, she recalled, she felt a bit woozy, and a friend sat her in front of the television and let her watch cartoons.

The Kid, Blue, and I arrived in Arcata, a small, well-kept Northern town, around dusk. After dinner, we drove to a farm owned by a couple whom I'll call Nick and Danielle. Nick, who had long brown hair and Mediterranean features, and Danielle, a yoga-toned blonde, had both worked as massage therapists in Malibu. One day, a massage client of Nick's asked him about dispensaries, and he took her to one. "She saw people spending two thousand dollars at the counter," Nick said, with a laugh. "She said, 'What kind of business *is* this?' " Her next reaction was to suggest that Nick and Danielle could run a dispensary, and that she could front them the fifty thousand dollars they would need to get started. They soon opened one, and, after the business took off, they bought the property up North.

Nick and Danielle's farm was at the end of a long, well-protected valley surrounded by high mountains. The turnoff was a dirt path barred by a classic old wooden ranch gate featuring the longest string of Tibetan prayer flags I saw during my stay in California.

Arriving at the house, we dumped our bags on a wooden deck. Nick, who was dressed in jeans and a sweaty T-shirt, showed us around the property. He was already a skilled grower: last year, he told me, he won second place in the Los Angeles Cannabis Cup, an annual competition, for a particularly potent strain of marijuana that he had grown from seeds he ordered through the mail from Amsterdam. But he did not consider pot his life's calling. He spoke of one day starting up a healing center on Mt. Shasta, where people could clean out their systems and go hiking.

The property lacked sufficient water for pot growing, Nick said, but their neighbor up the mountain helped them out. "He's a great bro," he said. "Every few days, he drops two thousand gallons down a pipe." In exchange, Nick paid the neighbor a minimal fee. "He's an older guy, he's been up here for forty years. He knows how hard it can be when you first move somewhere." Nick had about three hundred plants in the ground on a hill behind his house. On another plot of land, a few hills over, he had two hundred and fifty plants, as insurance against a targeted raid on his property.

A perfect half-moon was shining brightly in the twilight. The North Star was already visible. Nick, Danielle, and some friends had gathered in the living room, whose focal point was a large homemade altar, for meditation, surrounded by burning tea candles. At the kitchen table, a friend of Nick's, Charlie, packed a large water pipe with the smoke of the day. Next to Charlie was Nick's friend Dylan Fenster, from Venice, who was spending a few months up North to help with the harvest. He said that he smoked marijuana primarily to deal with the pain from a degenerative spinal condition; he carried his doctor's letter in his back pocket. "Twice in the last six months, I've been cited for smoking in public," he told me. "Both times I got the weed back, and both times the judge admonished the cops, 'You know, this is legal.' "

On the fridge, someone had posted a handwritten sign with the motto "Today is the day we manifest heaven on earth and godly bliss." Water pipes were passed around, and everyone got high. After four hits on Nick's bong, the slogans on the refrigerator started to vibrate with uncommon significance. I looked over at Blue and saw that he was dozing off again, this time with a homemade bong resting on his chest.

"I always wanted to heal the world or find the cure for cancer," Nick told me, with a faith-healer stare. "I have massaged over ten thousand people, and I hope to massage ten thousand more, and to heal the world with good medicine that I can grow here and provide on a compassionate basis to the people who need it."

Danielle started talking with the Kid about her wedding. "It was three days," she said. The wedding was held in a clearing in a forest, and a cigar box was passed around containing two hundred hand-rolled joints of Kush.

I headed out to a swinging bench on the porch and gazed intently at dozens of bright stars, and thousands of lesser stars. Nick came outside and offered another hit. "I love it here," he said. "I love the earth and the sounds and the smells and the sounds at night." The farm's location at the tip of the valley was particularly sweet. "There are no cars driving by and no planes flying over and no sirens going off or any kind of negative frequencies," he said. "It almost feels like it must have felt for the original pioneers who were first exploring California."

Every morning, Nick said, he woke up at seven, had a smoothie, and got in tune with nature. "Then I'll head out to the garden and I'll do some watering," Nick continued. "Depending on the day of the week, I'll maybe feed the plants, check in with them. Double-check for damage from the deer and whatever else has been creeping in through the cracks. Make sure the praying mantises are on duty." Growing marijuana outdoors, he felt, emphasized the holistic qualities of the plant rather than its psychotropic function. Someday, he said, he wanted to plant cherry trees, and peaches, plums, and apricots.

Nick said that he hoped to have kids, and he liked the idea of raising children on a farm. When I asked him whether he worried about the atmosphere of danger and illegality that came with operating a gray-area business, he shook his head. "I really feel like my karma's good," he said. "I'm not doing anything wrong." He owned the dispensary for which his crop was intended. He had never been arrested or done time in jail. "We've got a good lawyer, and we pay state sales tax," he said.

Nick's income from the dispensary last year, he said, was only around fifty thousand dollars. "That's what I make for all the scary shit I do," he said, looking up at the constellations. "I'm not making millions of dollars. I'm a hard-working, compassionate person, and I spend my time helping people. It makes me feel happy to bring smiles to the faces of people that have frequented my collective."

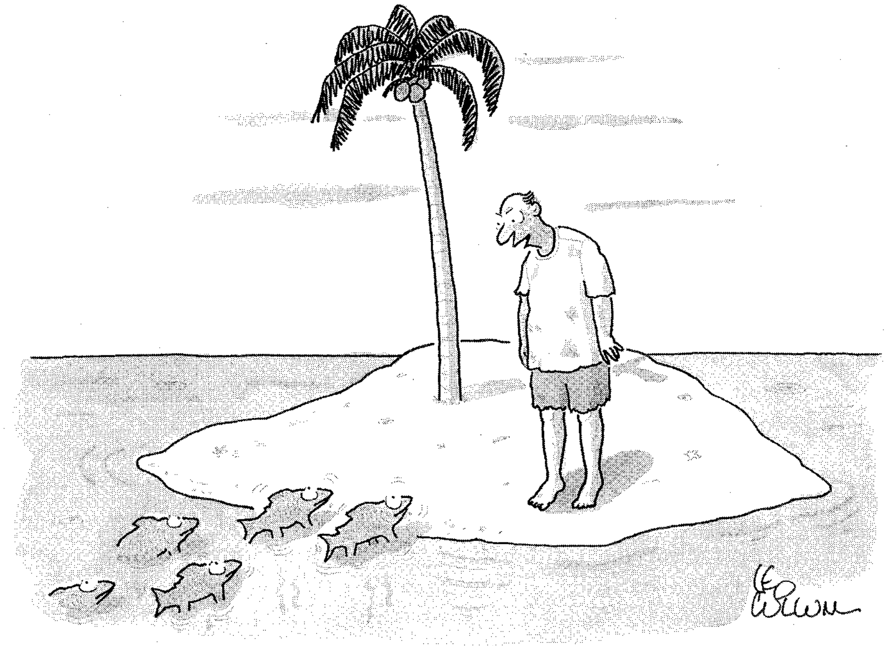
The next morning, I woke up on the floor of Nick and Danielle's living room, a ceiling fan whirring stale air above my head. There were three other people asleep in the room. As my head cleared, I perused a nearby bookshelf, which contained various speculative and esoteric texts, including "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Myth," "Secrets of Shamanism," and "Crop Circles: Signs of Contact."

I wandered outside. Behind the building were two long greenhouses made of translucent plastic sheeting supported by bent steel ribs, which sheltered smaller plants until they were ready to be put in the ground. I ran into Nick, who was already at work, and he led me on a tour of the slopes at the back of his property. "I planted these at the end of May," he said. "They're three months old." Outdoors, the sativa growth cycle is eleven weeks; the indica cycle is seven to nine. Toward the end of the cycle, the flowering plant loses its lush green leaves and manifests a shrivelled brown bud. "This is Afghooey crossed with Maui Wowie," Nick said, pointing to a six-foot plant with half its leaves missing. So far, he said with equanimity, he had lost about a quarter of his crop—more than a hundred thousand dollars' worth—to nibbling deer.

The three hundred or so plants on this part of the mountain were arranged in a V shape. The arms of the V ascended the mountain and spread out beneath the shelter of the surrounding forest. Nick admitted that the plants were not particularly well hidden, and said that the planting formation was mainly a respectful tip of the hat to the D.E.A. planes that flew over the valley. "They appreciate it when you're not growing it in rows, like a cornfield," he explained. Small planes had been buzzing overhead lately. Last night, one of Nick's visiting friends had reported that a helicopter had canvassed the property and shone a light down onto the front porch. The friend admitted to having been stoned when he saw the searchlight.

Virtually everyone in the valley made a living from growing pot, Nick said. The signs of their activity were hard to miss. To illustrate his point, he indicated to the top of a mountain across the way. "It's quite expensive to put electrical poles up a mountain," he said. As I followed his gaze, I caught sight of what looked like a sail. "You're looking at greenhouses," he explained.

With so much pot on the market in California, it paid to differentiate your crop. Later that day, Nick and Dan-



"This island isn't big enough for two clichés."

10 ITEMS
OR ~~LESS~~
FEWER

"What can I say? I was an English major."

• •

ielle's investor from Malibu arrived with a lawyer, who was there to inspect the farm's organic-farming methods. If the farm passed, the pot would be certified as an organic product. The lawyer was a tall, fit-looking middle-aged man from San Francisco who wore a gray suit and a white starched shirt with no tie. He declined to be interviewed about his business.

Captain Blue spent the day outside, roaming the property and taking photographs with a digital S.L.R. camera. He took pictures of Nick's friends working the pot fields and tending to the mature mother plants. And he took closeups of the enormous brown buds on a fifteen-foot-high pot plant. The physical exertion was hard for Blue. Beads of sweat collected on his forehead, and his shirt was soon soaking wet.

Blue handed me his camera, and I clicked through his photographs. I had told Blue many times that if he were slightly more motivated he could probably have a career as a photographer. My motherly attempts to lure Blue away from a life centered on pot had created a certain degree of tension in our friendship, even though he claimed not to mind. The truth was that Blue's life had never been better. He was making money. People depended on him. He was a respected member of his community. He treated the people in his life—growers, suppliers, patients, customers—in a considerate fashion. He had even figured out a way to keep his marijuana business within the letter of California state law.

But it is hard to argue that what Blue does for a living is the kind of activity that California's medical-marijuana laws were designed to protect. Though he is not a dangerous criminal, he is not exactly a hospice worker, either. He is a gray-area entrepreneur, working the seams of a hidden economy, populated by tens of thousands of people whose lives and minds and bank accounts it has altered forever, even as the rest of the country is only beginning to realize that it exists.

After leaving Nick's farm, Blue, the Kid, and I stopped at a diner in Redway to get a slice of blackberry pie. While we ate, I watched a long-haired teen-ager guide her stoned father to their car. His hair was gray, and longer than hers, and when he stepped off the curb and started to amble toward a black BMW she grabbed his arm. "Dad, this is not your car," she said sweetly. "Your car is over there."

Humboldt's economy is so heavily dependent on cannabis cultivation that you can drive for miles on well-kept highways and back roads without discovering a single legitimate source of income, aside from honey stands. Heading north, we eventually entered a maze of logging roads on a private reserve. A bunch of hippies grew pot in the forest, and the local cops stayed away.

Our destination was a house occupied by a woman who identified herself as Emily. A wiry marijuana sharecropper who also works as an environmental activist, she was busy watering her plants. There were twenty-five plants in all, surrounded by a fence on which hung a laminated patient's letter, signed by Ken Miller, M.D., stating that the marijuana was intended for medical purposes. Because marijuana is a fungible commodity, like soybeans or rice, there is no way to tell the difference between marijuana that winds up going to patients and marijuana that winds up on the street. The doctor's letter was, therefore, halfway between a legal document and a good-luck charm. Tibetan prayer flags fluttered along the length of the fence.

Emily was thin, with curly hair, and had a solitary, independent air; she'd been living alone for five months. She wore a gray T-shirt advertising a club called the Boom-Boom Room, in Cambodia. Her hands were covered with homemade tattoos of the kind that skater kids draw on each other.

The Kid and Emily were old friends, and they quickly launched into the technical details of Emily's growing regimen. "It's a three-day flip with Penetrator and a carbo load," Emily said, and then I lost them.

After Emily finished her watering, we

hiked over the mountain to a patch of twenty plants, where she went through the same routine. We sat on a couch that someone had carried up the mountain, and looked down on the verdant valley below as Emily described her growing arrangements. The house where we first met was owned by a man in his fifties, Emily said, who lived on the peak of the next mountain over. In addition to the two parcels of land that Emily tended, her host had half a dozen other plots in and around the reserve, which were worked by other sharecroppers. By taking care to stay under the local limit of ninety-nine plants on each of his properties, Emily's host had averted most of the risk inherent in his profession while enjoying an income large enough to finance a laid-back life of self-exploration. He also donated considerable funds to environmentally friendly social-action projects in Central America and South America.

Emily had come to Humboldt ten years ago as a young activist, working to save old-growth redwoods. She first encountered marijuana plants after she picked some edible mushrooms on a friend's land, cooked them up in marijuana-laced butter, and ate a good meal with some wine. That evening, her friend went outside briefly and returned with three huge plants over his shoulder. He taught Emily and some other activists how to trim the plants, separating the buds from the leaves over a framed screen with a sheet of glass underneath, to catch loose trichomes.

Emily decided to stay in the mountains. She loved the odd mixture of people who lived in a place with no apparent cash economy: the old lesbian couples who made jam and grew pot, the acupuncturists with connections to the San Francisco drag-queen scene, the old hippie ladies whose grower husbands had left them years ago and who toughed it out on the land they got in the divorce. Gazing at the setting sun, Emily said, "I think a lot of those people were drawn up here for intuitive reasons—soul reasons, or whatever." The problem with growing pot back then, she said, was that it was illegal, and that changed you. "You had to carry a gun and be scared of people, and you lost track of the reason you came up here."

Before the legalization of medical marijuana, she said, the wholesale price of good weed was forty-eight hundred dollars a pound. Now it was between twenty-two and twenty-six hundred. That was still profitable, though, and there were fewer stories in the newspapers about people being bound and gagged by cash-hungry gangsters.

The one thing that hadn't changed was the Humboldt Slide. "You start at this really great percentage, and you're buddy-buddy and everything's great," Emily said. As the harvest approaches, growers inevitably begin to run out of money and get greedy, and the sharecroppers lose whatever leverage they had earlier in the growing cycle, when their daily attention was necessary for the young plants to survive. Emily's wage the previous year was initially set at a third of the value of the plants that she harvested. Later, her boss "slid" her percentage to a sixth, meaning that she owned only a dozen of the eighty plants that she grew that season. Emily's philosophical approach to her losses is psychologically necessary for surviving in a gray-area business, where there are no signed contracts and recourse to the police or the courts is impossible, even in Humboldt. ("Officer, this man had me growing marijuana on his land for five months, and now he's only giving me twelve plants!")

Providing that the weather and the authorities coöperated, Emily expected to end up with approximately twenty pounds of pot. She would dispose of it in whatever manner brought her the most money; she thought it could fetch as much as fifty thousand dollars.

"There's a bunny!" she cried out as a tiny brown rabbit scampered through her marijuana plants. "Oh, he's cute!" Being around plants made her happy, she said. She'd be even more excited to grow something else, if it paid decently. Growing pot required a careful rhythm between periods of benign neglect and periods of close, loving attention. She noted that all her marijuana plants were females. "They're ladies, right?" she joked. "So how do ladies like to be treated? They like to be given lots of attention and then left the fuck alone for a few days to revel in it. If you hang on to them all the time, they're not going to do anything for you."

That morning, Emily said, she had spent four hours on eight plants, plucking the thickest leaves in order to channel more energy to the buds. She had fertilized the soil with a mixture of bat and seabird guano. (Humboldt supermarkets sell the blend for nineteen dollars a gallon.) Her arms had become dark and sinewy from her labor.

Back at Emily's borrowed house, we got high on her private stash and settled in for the night. The living room was decorated with save-the-rain-forest posters and a fake-leather gray couch. On the table was a boom box, a Mason jar of marijuana, and a Mac PowerBook. There was no television set; the radio was tuned to NPR. Emily was reading William Morris and working on a half-finished jigsaw puzzle of a Brazil nut, which she had bought at the thrift store for a dollar. Puzzles were popular during growing season, she said. That's what being a grower in Humboldt County is like, she said. You do jigsaw puzzles at night, get high, and shit in the woods.

For Emily, that was enough. "It's *fuuun!* It's super-fun," she said the next morning, lazily sunning herself on top of the mountain and smoking a spliff. "We're gonna smoke it to the Man, you know?" Twenty years ago, people like Emily would have been too soft for the pot business in Humboldt County. The statewide legalization of medical marijuana has allowed for the illusion that farming pot can provide opportunities for travel and cool art projects and personal growth without any corresponding commitment to the perils of a life of crime. Medical marijuana has made it easy for people like Emily, the Kid, and Captain Blue to see growing pot as a casual life-style choice. By going into the pot business, Emily had made the kind of compromise with reality that idealistic people often make when they get older and lose faith in their ability to effect wholesale change, and when they need the money.

Growing ganja lets you feel that you're still living on the edge, especially when you've become a little complacent politically. Emily nodded, and took another puff. "The forest is still getting cut down or whatever," she said, watching the fragrant smoke swirl in the breeze. "But you're still working out here. You're still subverting the Man. And you're getting people high." ♦

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An audio interview with David Samuels.

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vatched the climax of their rivalry.

PERSONAL HISTORY

ALL THE ANSWERS

The quiz-show scandals—and the aftermath.

BY CHARLES VAN DOREN

For fourteen weeks in the winter and spring of 1956-57, I came into millions of American homes, stood in a supposedly soundproof booth, and answered difficult questions. I was considered well spoken, well educated, handsome—the very image of a young man that parents would like their son to be. I was also thought to be the ideal teacher, which is to say patient, thoughtful, trustworthy, caring. In addition, I was making a small fortune. And then—well, this is what happened:

I don't remember the dinner clearly, except that at some point in the early fall of 1956 I was talking with a man named Albert Freedman, who knew a friend of mine. Freedman was about my age, suave and well dressed—certainly no bohemian, like most of my friends. He asked me what I thought of "Tic Tac Dough."

I didn't have a television set in those days, but I knew that Al Freedman was in the TV business. And I'd certainly heard about the game shows, where people could win a lot of money. Al told me that contestants on "The $64,000 Question" could win that amount and on some shows they could win even more.

"Your father's a professor at Columbia?" he asked, and, when I nodded, he asked if I was, too.

I told him that I was an instructor of English—a long way from being a professor. I was not comfortable talking about myself, especially when he asked me how much an instructor of English made. When I told him, he just looked at me.

Later, I asked my friend to tell me more about Freedman, and she said that he was a producer for Jack Barry and Dan Enright, who created shows like "Tic Tac Dough." Freedman called me a few days later. When I learned what he wanted, I telephoned Gerry—Geraldine Bernstein, the young woman I had been dating and whom I married six months later.

I told her that Al had persuaded me to take a test and that, depending on how I did, they might want me for a new show called "Twenty-One," which was structured like blackjack. "The winner gets quite a bit," I said. "The guy who's on the show now has already won something like twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Promise me you won't agree to do this without talking to me first," I remember her saying.

"O.K., I promise. They probably won't ask me."

They did—at least, Al Freedman did. He called me and told me that his job was on the line. A man named Herb Stempel was winning week after week, but he wasn't popular and the ratings were suffering.

"They want me to find a contestant who can beat Herb Stempel," Al said. "It might be you."

It wasn't hard to guess why Al was interested in me. My father was Mark Van Doren, a poet and critic and, as Al Freedman knew, a legendary teacher. My uncle Carl, his oldest brother, had been a professor of American literature at Columbia. In 1912, Carl had married Irita Bradford, who not long afterward was named the book-review editor of the New York *Herald Tribune.* Carl resigned his Columbia professorship in order to pursue a writing career, which included winning a Pulitzer Prize for biography (of Benjamin Franklin); he helped my father to become a teacher of literature at Columbia, too. By 1956, Carl was dead and my father was close to retirement, after nearly forty years.

The first time Al called, he asked me to come to his apartment. When I arrived, he seemed nervous. I wondered what I was getting into.

Right away, he said, "You remember I told you about this fellow Stempel? Well, the sponsors want him to be beaten. He'll walk away with a bundle, but they want somebody more sympathetic."

"Do they have a right to do that?"

"Hey, come off it, Charlie. Don't be naïve." And he launched into his argument—that, when all was said and done, these game shows were mere entertainment. "Even Shakespeare is entertainment," he said, although he conceded that the shows, unlike the plays, were presented as the real thing.

Al played an episode of "Twenty-One" for me, in which Stempel seemed very sure of himself. His answers were obviously based on genuine knowledge. I say "obviously," although I realized that I couldn't be certain. How would anyone know?

Stempel's posture and gestures were awkward, his clothes were too tight—he seemed almost to be choking in his shirt—and his speech was wooden. I remembered Al's remark that I might have a good chance against him, and then he came right out and said it: "I've thought about it, Charlie, and I've decided you should be the person to beat Stempel. And I'll help you do it." He held up his hand. "I swear to you, no one will ever know. It will be just between you and me. Jack Barry"—the show's host—"won't know and Dan Enright won't, either. Stempel won't know—I've got a way to handle that. The sponsors won't know—anyway, they'll be so happy they won't give a damn. And the audience will never know, because I won't tell them, and you won't, either."

He suggested that I could make at least eight thousand dollars, maybe a good deal more. I was guaranteed a thousand dollars for the first show.

"How would you do it?"

"Jack would ask you a question you could answer and Stempel couldn't."

I leaned my elbows on the table, resting my head in my hands. He was telling me, in so many words, that the show was fixed. "I don't know," I said again. "When would this be?"

A few days later, I took Gerry to dinner at Steak au Pommes Frites, the midtown restaurant where we'd had our first date. We drank some wine and then I told her. She didn't say much; she's a woman of few, choice words. But she didn't like any of it.

My first appearance on "Twenty-One" was on November 28, 1956. I must have put the whole thing out of my mind, but about a week after my conversation with Freedman I suddenly found myself in the studio, with the red light glowing above the camera, totally unaware that I was being watched by millions of people. Herb Stempel by then had been on the show for six straight weeks and had won some seventy thousand dollars. You can "quit right now," Jack Barry was saying to Stempel, in a voice practiced in arousing suspense, "and a check will be waiting for you, or you can decide to continue playing."

Barry then introduced me: "He teaches music at Columbia University, and was a student at Cambridge University, in England . . . and his hobby is playing the piano in chamber-music groups."

Barry was reading from a "continuity card" written in haste. In fact, I played the piano only clumsily and I taught literature. There was no time for corrections, I knew; Al had stressed this. Anyway, Barry was racing ahead, asking me if I was "related in any way to Mark Van Doren, up at Columbia, the famous writer." Papa, forgive me! Mama, forgive me! Uncle Carl, forgive me! I've remembered that moment for more than fifty years.

Al had given me my instructions. My understanding was that I was to reach seventeen points in the first round, twenty-one in the second—at which point I'd defeat Herb Stempel. To my astonishment, both Stempel and I reached twenty-one points in the second round. So bells rang, commercials were read, and both of us agreed to come back a week later.

It was then—on December 5, 1956—that I "beat" Herb Stempel and began my rise to celebrity. I learned later that the question Stempel missed was one that he could have answered easily. But they had him. If he failed to go along with his script, he could lose a lot of the money he had already "won."

Each week, Stempel had been told what to do: how many points to choose, how to deliver his answers. He was to pat his brow (it was hot in those glass booths) but not rub it, to avoid smearing his makeup. In addition, he was instructed to get a Marines-type "whitewall" haircut, to wear an ill-fitting suit (it had belonged to his deceased father-in-law), and to describe himself as a penurious student at City College. In fact, he was a Marines veteran married to a woman of some means who once appeared on the set wearing a Persian-lamb coat and was quickly spirited away so that she wouldn't blow his cover.

Stempel was also told to wear a six-dollar wristwatch that "ticked away like an alarm clock," as he later testified, and was audible when he stood sweating in the booth, earphones supposedly damping all outside sound. Once, he wore a new suit and had let his hair grow out, for which he was severely chastised by Enright. As Enright apparently believed, a successful game show needed two distinct personalities, one unsympathetic and unattractive, the other the opposite.

I continued to appear on "Twenty-One" until March 11, 1957. During those four months, Freedman never stopped coaching me, and I came to see just how carefully controlled the show was. In our sessions, he would ask me questions, I would answer them—and then he would tell me *how* to answer them: pause here; add this or that remark or aside; always seem to be worried, anxious; never answer too quickly, let the suspense build up. One January night, I was asked to give the nicknames of several Second World War airplanes, and in February I was asked to name the seven Prime Ministers of Britain between the world wars. A critic later wrote that mine "was a remarkable and seductive performance." Toward the end, my face appeared on the cover of *Time* (with earphones superimposed on my head), and I was seen in public with movie starlets (the dates were arranged by Barry and Enright); a couple of women found out where I lived and came to my door.

For several weeks, the programs had ended in ties between me and a lawyer named Vivienne Nearing. At one point, it looked as if I could have won more than a hundred and fifty thousand dollars—except I couldn't, because Al had informed me that I would lose to her. On the evening of March 11th, Jack Barry asked both of us to name the kings of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Jordan, Iraq, and Belgium. According to our covert script, Nearing knew the answers and I didn't. For years after that, people enjoyed asking me if I knew the name of the one I missed—the king of Belgium.

A photograph of me writing the figure "$128,000" on a blackboard was widely published. I deposited the net amount (a little less than that) and began to try to understand the life I'd created. Part of it was going to work for the National Broadcasting Company, which was willing to sign me to a three-year contract as a consultant on public-service and educational broadcasting, at an annual rate of fifty thousand dollars.

One day in the spring of 1957, shortly after Gerry and I were married, my father and I had a conversation. We were walking slowly down the road from his house, a road lined with stone walls on each side. At that time, our neighbor pastured heifers and dry cows—pregnant cows waiting to deliver—in the nearby fields. When we walked at night, the cows, curious about us, would breathe and snuffle, sometimes scaring our city friends.

"I've never asked you about this whole experience, Charlie," Dad said. He was dressed in overalls, denim shirt, and boots, like the farmers he was descended from. In New York, he was an elegant figure, but this was the father I loved best. "But I get the impression you're not too comfortable with your new fame—I mean, the way the quiz show may have changed your life. You have many opportunities now that you might never have had before. But I've wondered if they're good—for you, being the man you are, or the man I think you are."

I didn't know what to say, because I suddenly sensed that he knew the truth about the show. I had thought of telling him, but I hadn't been able to.

As we walked on, he said, "You know, I've never been certain you wanted to live my life over again—be a professor at Columbia or anywhere." He mentioned the contract I had with NBC. "I know it's tempting, but it might not be the right thing for you, either." He brought up Mortimer J. Adler, a family friend who was then on the board of editors at the Encyclopædia Britannica, and said that Adler had talked about making me editor-in-chief of the Britannica.

"You might or you might not want to take that on," he said. "Or you might just want to be a writer. You could live for years on the money you've won, couldn't you?"

I had lived in Paris for a time, and Dad recalled how happy I had seemed then. He mentioned a novel I had worked on—"You somehow lost the thread of it," he said. "You and Gerry could go to Paris." And he added, "You can do anything you want, Charlie. I wish you knew that."

"I don't?"

"No, you don't. You're now one of the most famous people in the country—much more famous than I ever was." He quoted Mark Twain—"You surprised everybody, and astonished the rest"—and urged me to "wipe the slate clean, start over."

"You think the slate is dirty?" I couldn't look at him.

We walked along for a while. Then he said, "It's none of my business. Dirty or not—and I don't know what 'dirty' would be—the fact is you're caught up in something you may not really want." That was as direct as he got that day. "Sometimes I think you're having a lot of fun, other times you seem sad. I think turning your back on all of it might make you really happy."

Tears came. "Dad," I said, "I'm sorry, but it's just not possible."

"Why not possible?"

"I'm afraid there's no way out anymore. In a way . . . I think I'd like to have done what you describe. As far as fame is concerned, you know as well as I do that celebrity isn't the same as fame." Finally, I said, "Oh, shit, Dad, I wish I were . . . free to do this." My father and I never talked about it again.

NBC News tried hard to find work for me, as a writer of radio newsbreaks, for example, but I wasn't very good at it. In the summer of 1958, they assigned me to the White House.

This was a strange experience. NBC's old Washington hands weren't welcoming. After all, here was this neophyte who was probably being paid more than they were but who didn't know how to do the simplest things. To punish me, they let me flounder unless it would make them look bad. They couldn't always tell in advance. For example, they asked me to go to the airport and interview John Foster Dulles on his return from some international conference—not an important story, or they would have sent someone else. I managed to be on the steps when the Secretary of State emerged from his plane, but I was wearing sunglasses, because the summer sun was in my eyes. He glared at me and very brusquely answered my carefully composed questions, then pushed past. When I asked my bureau chief what I'd done wrong, he said, "You damn fool, you don't wear sunglasses when you speak to Mr. Dulles." What made it all worse was that I had to be away from home during the week; our daughter, Elizabeth, was born that summer, and I missed my young family.

I fared better doing segments for Dave Garroway's "Wide Wide World" show, a Sunday-afternoon cultural program. I soon became a semi-regular on this program, appearing once a month in place of Garroway. Some of "my" shows were pretty good, and the arrangement led to Garroway's accepting me as a regular on "Today." (Garroway, a television pioneer, was the first host—and star—of "Today.") I was awkward at first, but before long Dave gave me a daily five-minute spot at the top of the hour in which to report on cultural and literary events; I read a great poem or two every Friday morning and talked about its author. Viewers liked this; so did Dave.

Being on "Today" meant getting up every weekday morning at five o'clock, appearing on the show for two hours, writing my spot for the next day, and then

MIME CELEBRITY ROAST
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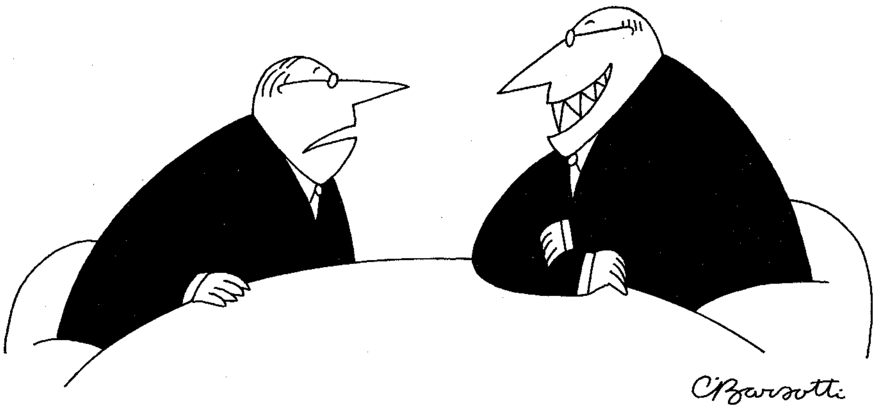


“Damn—I thought you were just having them whitened.”

taking the subway to Columbia to teach, where my sudden celebrity seemed to impress no one. I was busy but also relatively content. I would have been more content if I’d been able to escape the consequences of what I’d done on “Twenty-One.”

In the summer of 1958, stories appeared in the New York *Post* and later in the Hearst newspapers—the *Daily Mirror* and the *Journal-American*—raising questions about the quiz shows. People who knew the entertainment business didn’t have much doubt about what was going on, although they didn’t speak out. Why would they? At the height of the boom, there were as many as twenty-four prime-time shows, each giving away significant sums, attracting large audiences, and producing large profits for the sponsors.

One day, Al Freedman called me and invited me to lunch. I hadn’t seen him since my last game-show appearance. When I asked about the rumors (particularly the ones about “Twenty-One”), he told me not to worry—even though he might have to go down to the District Attorney’s office to answer questions. “Of course I won’t tell them,” he said. “Nobody will—Jack or Dan or me. We’re the only ones who know about it.”

I was having trouble swallowing my food. “I didn’t know Jack knew about it.”

“He didn’t really know,” Al said, or something to that effect. He looked embarrassed. “It’s not anything. They’re partners, of course—close.”

Then he talked about Herb Stempel. “Enright says he’s crazy. He knows some things about him . . . psychiatric treatment, threats, all sorts of things.” He looked me in the eye. “It’ll be O.K. Whatever happens—I won’t say a word.” He waited, and, as I recall, he said, “There’s a lot at stake. Jack and Dan are selling the company to NBC. I don’t know the details, but I think there’s a couple of million dollars. . . .” He paused; he clearly wanted to be sure that I was dependable—and he surely didn’t want me to know that anyone else was talking. “They’re counting on you,” he said.

Soon enough, in October of 1958, the call came: Joseph Stone, a Manhattan Assistant District Attorney, wanted to ask me a few questions. They wanted me to come downtown—I can’t remember the venue, but I remember that it made me very uneasy.

My meeting with Stone, who seemed to be in charge of a quiz-show investigation, was a disaster. I was seated in a chair with a light in my eyes; Stone and three or four other men sat or stood about ten feet away. I later tried to write down much of what Stone asked me, beginning with questions about the interview in *Time* from a year earlier. Was I telling the truth when I talked to the reporter?

I hesitated, trying to remember everything I’d said. “I left out some things that were none of his business.”

“I’m interested in the things you didn’t leave out, the things you said,” Stone said. “For example, how you got on that show, ‘Twenty-One.’ ”

He had read in *Time* about the tests I’d taken, and wanted to know who’d contacted me. I told him about Al Freedman, and how we’d met during dinner with a mutual friend.

“Did Al Freedman say you had done very well on the test, and that was why Barry and Enright wanted you to try out for the show?”

“Yes.”

“Did Freedman say only one person had ever done better?”

I didn’t remember saying that to the reporter. I shook my head.

“I’m going to repeat my question. Did he say only one person had ever done better on that second test?”

“Maybe he did. I’m not sure.”

“He did say that, Mr. Van Doren. Thank you for trying to remember. Now, what I want to know is, did he tell you the name of the person—the only person—who had done better than you?”

The room was hot and I had kept my suit jacket on. Stone and the others were in shirtsleeves. I could feel the sweat trickling down from my armpits. I told Stone that if Freedman had said that, he probably would have named Herb Stempel.

Stone said that I must have known a lot of facts in order to win more than a hundred thousand dollars on “Twenty-One,” and I told him that I was lucky. With the bright light in my eyes, it was hard to see Stone’s face.

“I want to go back to the time when Freedman said the only person who had done better than you on the test was Herb Stempel. Did he also say that you would not be able to beat Stempel?”

“He said it would be hard.”

“Did he also say you would need a lot of luck to beat him?”

“I guess so.”

“I don’t believe he said that, Mr. Van Doren. What did he actually say? I want you to think very hard.”

“I’m trying.” My lips were dry.

“Did he say you would need help?”

I looked up, squinting in the lights, which seemed brighter than ever.

“No,” I said.

Stone’s grilling went on for an hour or so after that. I never admitted that I had received help. Finally, Stone said that I was free to go. I’ll never forget his last words: “You can lie to me, but I’m not going to let you lie to the grand jury.” The grand jury was being convened, Stone told me, and I would have to testify.

I rose unsteadily and walked out of the room. I suppose that, at the time, I hated him for making me feel like a criminal; he probably saw me as an arrogant liar. I have often wondered what would have happened if I had told the truth. When I went before the grand jury, I wasn't sure what I would say. When I looked at the jurors' faces, I saw that the foreman was a senior professor at Columbia, a man I knew by sight. And I panicked, thinking that if I told him the truth I would in effect be telling everyone at the university. So I lied. This was, of course, folly, since I had to tell the story anyway—to everyone, not just to him.

Many years later, Stone wrote to me asking me to help him publish a book about the quiz-show scandal. (The book was published in 1992.) He said that he'd never meant to hurt me and in fact had tried to protect me. I threw his letter away and never answered it.

One morning in August, 1959, I met Richard Goodwin, an investigator for a subcommittee of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. By then, I had been on "Today" for more than a year. I had just come off the set at the end of that morning's show—in fact, I was still at the desk, looking at notes for a piece I wanted to do the next day. What Goodwin said scared me. He told me that his subcommittee planned to hold hearings on the matter of the television quiz shows; clearly, the grand jury's work had made its way to Washington. Goodwin opened a folder and pointed to part of a transcript of the grand-jury proceedings. In the page or two that I read, Herb Stempel was testifying. I had thought the testimony was sealed, but evidently not.

He went on to tell me that my testimony contradicted what Stempel said and, worse, that Freedman and Enright had returned to the grand jury and confirmed what Stempel had said.

I had read something about this in the newspapers, but I hadn't thought much about it, foolishly believing that it had nothing to do with me. Goodwin glanced around at the busy office. "Is there a place where we could talk?"

Dave Garroway was standing near the door, waiting for me to go to the daily story conference. I asked him if I could come later. "There's this guy—I have to talk to him for a few minutes," I said. Dave looked only mildly curious.

We found an empty office and I shut the door. There was a table and a couple of chairs. "Do you want to read any more?" Goodwin asked, pointing to the transcript.

I shook my head. I was surprised to learn that Freedman had returned to the grand jury and changed his testimony; I didn't know you could do that. Goodwin told me that Freedman and Enright had wanted to warn me but were told that they couldn't. Goodwin also told me that I wasn't the only one who had lied. From all that he said, I realized that the committee wanted my story to come out at hearings in Washington. Before Goodwin left, he said, somewhat mysteriously, "I can only say it would be best for you, Professor Van Doren, if you say nothing to anybody." To this day, I don't understand what he meant. We shook hands and I told him the easiest way to get out of the building.

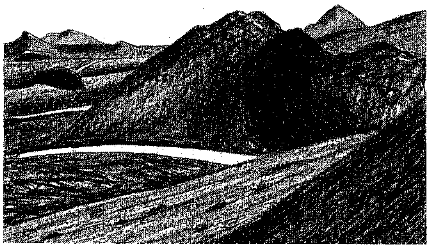
I went to the story conference but I couldn't keep my mind on what was going on. "I'm sorry," I said, "I have to get home." I said that our daughter had an earache and Gerry wanted me there. Garroway told me to go ahead.

The news broke a month later—September, 1959—and the first sign of what it meant to me, as I recall, was a remark made by Dick Rubin, my new agent. I'd been waiting to see if NBC wanted to renew my contract. I asked Rubin what was going on.

"Of course they're gonna renew. They're just waitin' till this stuff blows over." He glanced at me. "There's no problem, is there?"

But it was clear that NBC was growing nervous. When I met with some of the executives, they reminded me that a year earlier, on "Today," I'd said that I didn't know about any funny business on any quiz show. Probably they realized then that I wasn't telling the truth, even when I declared—privately, of course—that I had been offered help by Al Freedman but had refused it.

The congressional hearings began on Tuesday, October 6, 1959, in the caucus room of the Old House Office Building. My turn came on Monday, November 2nd. I had written a statement and showed it to my father. "I'll go with you," he said, and he and Gerry accompanied me to Washington.



I asked permission to read my statement. In it, I told the entire story, for the first time. The committee members asked a few questions, but there was really not much else to say, and they told me that I was free to go.

When I stepped out the door of the caucus room, I saw a large crowd—members of the press, photographers, and bystanders. I realized that there was no way to avoid repeating my testimony. I was, I said, "foolish, naïve, prideful, and avaricious," and added, "I have deceived my friends, and I had millions of them." After that, Gerry, my father, and I made our way to Union Station, where we caught a train to New York. We arrived home in the early evening and were met outside our house by, among many others, a reporter who informed us, first, that NBC was going to fire me, and, second, that Columbia had accepted my resignation. All I could say was that I wasn't surprised.

The next afternoon, Dave Garroway had to tape a news report on my shame. I didn't hear the broadcast the following morning, but I was told that he had been genuinely upset—he couldn't finish the broadcast, and had to turn it over to his co-hosts. We wrote to each other, but I have no recollection of what our letters said, and after that we fell out of touch. That week, Gerry went alone to Columbia to pick up a few of my personal things, and I didn't go back to the campus for twenty-three years—until the day that my son graduated.

Along with Vivienne Nearing and eight others, I later pleaded guilty to second-degree perjury, a misdemeanor, for lying to the grand jury about getting answers from producers. The six weeks between my confession and Christmas of that year, 1959, were mostly agony.

But a small gift from my father helped me through it. He had wrapped a square box in tissue paper, sealed with Scotch tape. The box contained a gyroscopic compass, the kind you can start spinning and put on the edge of a glass, where it will stay upright till the spinning stops. A card in the box read, "May this be for you the whirligig of time that brings in his revenges." I knew the quotation. It's from "Twelfth Night." Feste, the mean-spirited clown, has been unmasked, but those are his last words, thrown over his shoulder. The play's audience knows that somehow he will survive and live to taunt some other master. I didn't ask my father what he had meant by it, because I knew he was saying that I, too, would survive and somehow find a way back. I just hugged him and said, "Thank you, Papa."

By the end of 1959, thanks to the intercession of a former college roommate, I would set off on a new career—at the Encyclopædia Britannica, in Chicago. I would earn about twenty per cent of what I'd been getting with NBC, but that was all right with me.

In 1965, we moved to Chicago, the site of the Britannica headquarters. (By then, we'd had a second child, John, who was born in 1962.) We stayed in Chicago for seventeen years, during which I got the title "vice-president of editorial" and wrote and edited a number of books, both by myself and with Mortimer Adler; one of these was a new edition of Adler's immensely popular "How to Read a Book." In 1982, when I was fifty-six, I retired. I had a contract for another book, and it was followed by still another, "A History of Knowledge."

One of the best things about writing is that it's private. I can sit with my thoughts without having to respond to people who say, "Aren't you Charles Van Doren?" Well, that's my name, I say to myself, but I'm not who you think I am—or, at least, I don't want to be. It's been hard to get away, partly because the man who cheated on "Twenty-One" is still part of me.

One day in the spring of 1990, a man named Julian Krainin appeared at the door of a small conch cottage we had bought and renovated in Key West. He was affable; he had come to Florida to visit his parents, he told us, and had drifted down the Keys. He said that he'd learned that I lived there and wanted to see me. After we had chatted for a few minutes, he came to the point of his visit: he told me that a production company was thinking of doing a television show about the quiz-show affair, and he guessed they'd want to talk to me.

For more than thirty years, I had refused to be interviewed, and I told him that I hadn't changed my mind. He said that the program would be coming from WGBH, in Boston, one of the leading public-television stations, and that he was a documentary filmmaker. Also, he had some advice: "I've found that if an important figure in a documentary refuses to coöperate, it leaves the producers free to say . . . not just whatever they want but maybe some things he'd prefer they didn't say."

Krainin was certainly skilled in the art of journalistic seduction. "Have you ever thought of returning to television, Charles?" he asked. "I think you have a lot to offer." He went on to mention two popular public-television series—James Burke's "Connections" and Jacob Bronowski's "The Ascent of Man"—with the suggestion that I might be the host of a series, too. I was being drawn in, and we chatted until Gerry arrived with a pitcher of lemonade and some cookies. "What were you two talking about?" she asked.

I made a joke of it: "My going back on TV as a kind of idiot savant." I laughed, but she didn't. I saw the dismay in her eyes. "There's no chance of Charlie's doing that," she said.

Without looking at Gerry, I told Krainin that I knew something about the history of philosophy, and even sketched out a possible series on the subject. "Think of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas, Bacon, Locke, Hume, Voltaire, Jefferson, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche," I said. "That's thirteen right there."

Krainin brightened. Gerry was silent, her lips compressed. "That's very interesting," Krainin said. When he was gone, Gerry and I walked down Simonton to Catherine, across to Frances, through the cemetery to Angela, and home again. She said nothing at first.

"What do you think of that?" I asked finally.

"I think you're being foolish."

Krainin called two weeks later. He sounded breathless, and told me that the "people" in Boston wanted an outline from me. He said he'd pass it on to them, and after discussing the weather in New England he brought up the other program.

My program wasn't a go; I don't suppose it ever had a chance. Deep down I believed that the two were connected—and I still do. (I also know that Krainin has a different recollection about our first conversations.) "The Quiz Show Scandal," written and co-produced by Julian Krainin for "American Experience," aired on WGBH in 1992. At the end, they thanked a list of people. Although I had done nothing, I was at the top of the list.

The program was pretty good. I learned some things I hadn't known, one of which was that about a hundred contestants had lied to the grand jury, although only seventeen of us were indicted, arrested, and arraigned. (None of us was sentenced to jail.) It brought back to me how we were marched through the streets of downtown New York (accompanied by photographers), forced to hand over our valuables, take off our belts and shoelaces, and get fingerprinted. I hadn't remembered that this had happened to anyone but me; I suppose I'd been in shock. I do remember that it was hard to keep my trousers up, because I'd lost weight.

I also learned that when "Twenty-One" was first on it wasn't rigged, and it was—therefore?—a failure. Herb Stempel was the first to agree to the fix; it was said that fifty million people watched us on the night when he "took a dive," as he put it. I learned that Al Freedman eventually got an executive job at Penthouse International, and founded Penthouse's spinoff magazine *Forum;* and that, after ten years or so, Barry and Enright were allowed to come back to television and resume their partnership with new programs.

I didn't hear from Julian Krainin for a while. Then he telephoned to ask if he and his wife could drop by our house in Cornwall, Connecticut, because he had "great news." Gerry wasn't enthusiastic, but I said, "Why not? He won't bite."

The news this time was that Robert Redford was planning to make a feature film about the quiz shows and me. Krainin was a producer and Richard Goodwin was a co-producer. (In 1959, Goodwin had gone to work as a speechwriter for John F. Kennedy and, later, for his brother Robert.) Gerry was upset, but the more I thought about it the more I felt that it couldn't really hurt. What the hell? Our children were grown, and we wouldn't have to watch it.

Krainin returned a short time later. I asked what Redford wanted from me. After all, I pointed out, my story was in the public domain, and WGBH did perfectly well without me.

He told us how much Redford admired me and hoped for my help to make the film even better. And, as I recall, he added that Redford wanted my approval—my "guarantee of its truthfulness." He said that Herb Stempel had already agreed to be a consultant, and when I asked what there might be in it for me he replied that the filmmakers would be willing to pay a fee—fifty thousand dollars. And that was how we left it, with Krainin promising to call me in a few days for a decision.

When Krainin called, he said, "I'm sending you a contract. The fee is higher—a hundred thousand dollars. You won't have to do much. Bob really wants you on board."

Our family had a meeting, sitting around our kitchen table. John, our son, was for my taking the money. "They're going to make the movie anyway, whatever you do," he said. "Everybody else is making money out of it, why shouldn't you?"

Gerry agreed—they would say whatever they wanted—"But taking the money gives them a kind of license." Liz, our daughter, tended to agree with Gerry. Sally, John's wife, said it wasn't her place to say anything.

I argued for it on the grounds that John had stated. Gerry, though, was adamant: "I don't want to have anything to do with the whole thing. The film, the money . . . the money's yours if you want it. But you won't have me!" She added, "I'm not going to leave you, but you'll be on your own." She waited. "Please don't be a fool."

We decided to ask Sally's father, Bill Van Cleve, the managing partner of the law firm of Bryan Cave, in St. Louis. He asked me to fax him the document and let him think about it.

The morning after our family meeting, I had to go to Litchfield, and I played a K. T. Oslin tape in my truck. A song on it called "Money" had the refrain "I don't need money. All I need is you." I played it again, then again. "Oh, Honey," I said to myself, "I don't need money, all I need is you." Honey was Gerry's family childhood name.

When I got home, Gerry told me that Bill had called. "He thought you'd be wrong to sign it," she said. "The contract ties you up in knots. I told the children and I think they both agree."

"He's right, so are you, and I was wrong," I said.

The contract lay on the table in the kitchen. I picked it up and tore it into pieces. Just at that moment, the phone rang. Gerry answered. "It's him," she said, and handed me the phone. After I'd told Krainin our decision, I hugged Gerry, held on to her for a long time. Finally, she squirmed out of my grasp. "Let go!"

"Never!" I said.

The film opened in 1994, but months before that a curious thing happened. A car turned in to our road and drew up alongside the house. "I'm lost," the driver said. "Can you tell me how to find . . . ?" I realized later that he was Ralph Fiennes, who played me in the film. He told a reporter that he had driven by my house and had seen me looking "sad."

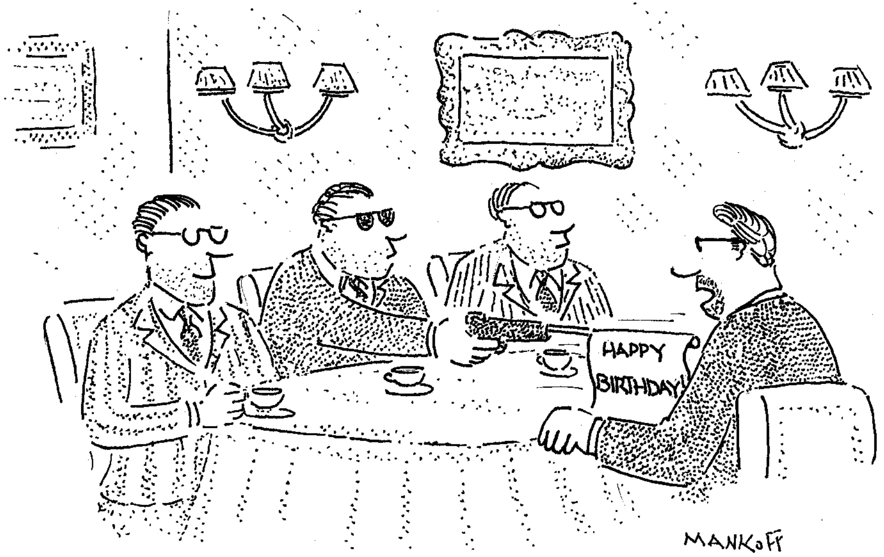
Of course, I eventually saw the movie. I understand that movies need to compress and conflate, but what bothered me most was the epilogue stating that I never taught again. I didn't stop teaching, although it was a long time before I taught again in a college. I did enjoy John Turturro's version of Stempel. And I couldn't help but laugh when Stempel referred to me in the film as "Charles Van Fucking Moron."

Today, Gerry and I live in a small, very old house on the place my father and mother bought more than eighty years ago. My father retired from his position as a professor of English at Columbia in 1959, when he was sixty-four, and moved to Cornwall, where they had always wanted to live. He told me that he regretted not having done this sooner. I wish he had lived long enough to see us come to live here, too, not just visit on weekends in good weather. He died in 1972. Gerry and the children had spent every summer and I'd spent my month's vacation here each September. Dad and I never talked about the quiz shows, but we did discuss his ongoing work and mine, and country things, which he loved and I did, too. After his death, my mother, who had published two very good novels and had enjoyed a successful journalistic career (including writing for *The New Yorker*), wrote to him every day until her own death, at ninety-six.

Our children and grandchildren love the place as much as we do. They come when they can, given the demands of their separate lives. Gerry and I are writing and teaching English at the Torrington campus of the University of Connecticut; last fall I taught the Shakespeare course, and Gerry taught the modern novel.

There are two houses, several barns, fields and woods. There are tools and machines: a truck and a tractor, two riding mowers, one of which doesn't work at the moment, and trimmers, chain saws, leaf blowers, a table saw, and plenty of gardening and other tools. I've mowed paths that wind through the fields and into the woods, and I hope the children will keep them up when I can't do it anymore.

Gerry and I went to Rome in the early spring, a fiftieth-anniversary gift to one another, and one morning I took my little gyroscope out of my toilet kit, where it has travelled with me since 1959. I set it spinning on the edge of my orange-juice glass, and, as I looked at it, I said "Thank you"—to it and to my father and my mother and to all the other people who helped us to survive. ♦

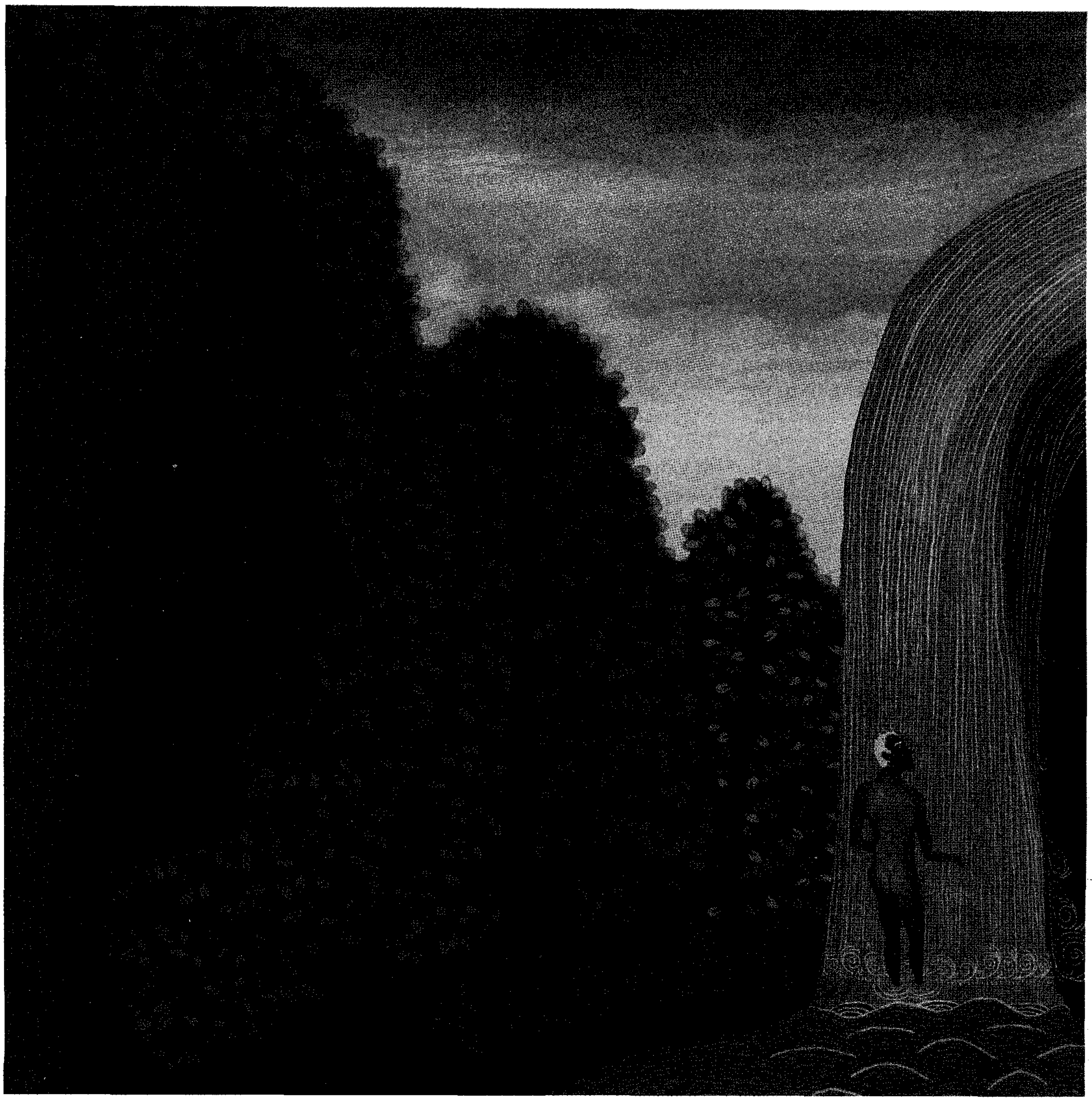


"Oh! You gave me such a start."

FICTION

THE TEACHER

BY RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA



It was the girls who first brought him here. I call them "girls" because of their girlish temperaments, though they were almost middle-aged. Maeve was by far the more emotional of the two, with a habit of turning her pale-blue eyes upward like a saint or a martyr. Betty was sturdier, with a square muscular body to anchor them both. They shared an old house in the town, one of those run-down, peeling places that smell of mold inside. During the two or three years I had known them, their goodness had made them take up several needy causes in the town: pregnant teens, abandoned families, boys caught stealing for drugs. One time, they sheltered a suspected sex offender, which made them very unpopular; when he turned out to be guilty, they remained unrepentant, unshaken in the faith that they had done the right thing.

They worked at home to make their living. Maeve typed documents on a computer; Betty read manuscripts for a publisher. That was how they had first met Dr. Chacko, by way of his manuscript, which he had submitted for publication. Betty's own publisher had been too conventional to understand it, and so had several others she had tried. She decided that the appearance of the manuscript may have been at fault—it seemed to be the product of a very old typewriter, with some letters too faded to read. So, in her spare time, Maeve had copied the entire work onto her computer; it was more than seven hundred pages when printed out, but she was as inspired as Betty, and it became their cause, along with Dr. Chacko himself.

They tried to explain his work to me, and it made them laugh that I didn't understand it. It was so simple, they said—it was life itself, life and death—which I said didn't sound all that simple to me. For them, they admitted, it was not the work but Dr. Chacko himself who was difficult to understand. But wasn't it always like that, with rare human beings? They tried to describe him to me, but they couldn't even say what nationality he was. They had taken him for an Italian, a Sicilian, until they discovered that he was partly Indian, the name Chacko coming from a Syrian Christian community in the south of India. They thought he was also partly Russian—or had he only lived in Russia? He had travelled to many distant places, but it was in England that he had started his first workshop. This had been dissolved, and so had some subsequent ones elsewhere; now they had high hopes for the workshop they had helped him start in New York City, about two hours away from our town upstate.

In the meantime, they were searching for a suitable place for him to live. Accommodation had been found in a partly converted loft in the city, but he longed for trees, open sky, water, if possible, and so, for his sake, did the girls. I knew what they had in mind. I lived by myself in my house; it was set in several acres of ground and had a separate cottage, which was unoccupied. The girls knew that I had been left alone here after ten years of what I had considered a satisfactory marriage, and in proposing Dr. Chacko for my cottage they were also hoping, I suspected, to relieve my loneliness. What they didn't know was that solitude had come to seem natural and pleasant to me. Of course, it had been different once, when my husband and I came here only at weekends with carloads of guests. That was before a cluster of modest homes had been built up to the back of the property—not for visitors from the city but for residents with jobs in the town, which itself had crept closer, with a diner and a Realtor's office. The place was no longer such a getaway for the people who had been our friends, and maybe still were his and his young wife's.

I'm not sure now why I agreed to let Dr. Chacko move into the cottage. I have a memory of him riding past on his bicycle, but it has merged with so many later memories of him and his bicycle. It was a very old model, held together here and there with string, and not quite big enough for him, so that it wobbled as he rode. I think it was this sight—of a thin gray-haired man mounted on an inadequate nag—that made me give in. He moved in the same afternoon. I had been using the cottage as a sort of storage dump, so there were some old pieces of furniture in there, which the girls helped him rearrange. Afterward, they came up to the house to assure me that I had done a good deed for which I would receive great reward. I assumed they meant that Dr. Chacko's proximity itself would be rewarding. But I had already begun to worry that he might visit me more often than I wished, and try to impose his philosophy or his mission on me, or whatever it was that had made the girls admire him so extravagantly.

This fear turned out to be unfounded. I saw him only when he rode past the house on his bicycle, presumably on his way to the train station. The girls had told me that the members of the workshop in the city paid his fare, plus a small fee. That appeared to be his only source of income while everyone waited for his manuscript to be published and make him famous. Meanwhile, the girls brought meals for him every day in little covered dishes, waving to me as they drove past in their pickup. So his presence really should not have disturbed me—except that it did. Maybe because I had grown used to being alone on the property, or because the thought of him working in the cottage, as the girls told me he did, refining and extending his ideas, gave the place a sort of potency. It was at some distance from the house and shielded from it by a mass of old trees, but the fact that it was invisible only increased its hold on my imagination.

I drove myself to the city to attend one of his workshops. New York held too many memories of the life I used to live, so the only times I went there now were to visit my doctor or to have my hair done. However, the place for which I was bound was unlike any I had known before. The house was in midtown, in a row of brownstones from the eighteen-seventies, now run-down and in the last stage of their existence. The only signs of life were here and there an air-conditioner dripping into the street or a window box planted with modest flowers that had not flourished. The house, when I found it, seemed to have lost all its tenants, for there was only one name beside the cluster of bells. I had to press it twice before a woman came down to open the door. She informed me that Dr. Chacko had already begun his work. Cutting my apology short, she sold me a fifteen-dollar ticket and told me to follow her. The stairs were worn and steep, but it was not too long a climb before she opened a door and ushered me inside.

There were about twenty people in the small room, more women than men. Most of them were squatting on the floor, but I was given a folding chair beside two elderly women and a cripple. With so many people crowded together, the room was very hot and the air somewhat

BALINT ZSAKO

fetid—partly, perhaps, because of the indifference to health and hygiene of those who have gone beyond worldly satisfactions. The women there reminded me of Betty and Maeve: the same age, the same homespun dresses, with their hair in a fringe or a bun, and also, shining under this plain appearance, the same glow of aspiration. This was shared even by the one young person there, a teen-age girl with long, unkempt blond hair, who kept her eyes upturned in the same way as Maeve. What was he telling them that left everyone so breathless? He spoke for several stretches of five or ten minutes, and when he paused they all shut their eyes to concentrate. Afterward, he asked them to explain what they had understood. Some of them seemed to have understood more than others. The blond girl had got it all wrong, and laughed along with the rest at having her error exposed; and the cripple had understood so well that he went into a lengthy exegesis that made Dr. Chacko invite him to take charge of the class. This, too, made everyone laugh—altogether there was a friendly atmosphere emanating from Dr. Chacko himself, who behaved the way a very good teacher does with his favorite students. Although some of the people there may not have found it easy to spare the fifteen-dollar entrance fee, they all contributed another four dollars for the mug of herbal tea and the cookie that allowed them to stay in his presence for a half hour longer. I couldn't help feeling out of place, partly because I had kept my shoes on, my high-heeled summer sandals, while everyone else's had been left in a heap outside the door—like those of pilgrims who had walked many dusty miles to reach their destination.

Dr. Chacko accepted my offer of a ride back home. He was asleep for most of the drive, slumped in the front seat with his legs stretched out as far as they would go. From time to time, he woke up briefly, not to talk but to sing snatches of song, gesturing with one hand as though scooping up some beautiful melody that hovered above him. When I asked him what it was that he was singing, his answer was to linger around a particularly lovely passage, making me a gift of it.

I didn't see him again for a few weeks. Then one day, at the height of the summer, I literally almost stumbled across him. I had spent the day in my air-conditioned house and had ventured out only into the evening air, when the sky was veiled in its dying light and the remains of a yellowed heat-haze. It was almost eight o'clock, but even the birds were still stirring uncomfortably, like restless sleepers, in their nests. It was while looking up at these restless birds in a tree that I stumbled on Dr. Chacko, who was lying beneath it. I had a shock, but he did not. He remained stretched out full-length, with his arms under his head. "It's cool here," he said. "Cool and beautiful." And he patted the ground beside him for me to join him.

Well, he was not young, and neither was I, and I should have thought nothing of it. And, actually, when I did lie down there was no awkwardness. Like him, I looked up into the roof of leaves; though thick, it had holes in it to let in what from our position looked not like a heat-exhausted sky but like stretches of pure cool silver. Dr. Chacko and I lay side by side, both of us gazing upward with the innocent pleasure of children or even angels—he seemed to be thinking more of the latter, for he said, "Yes, this is my evening paradise." When he added, "Especially after a day like we've had," I realized that he was referring not to my day in my air-conditioned house but to his in the cottage, where there wasn't even a fan.

I didn't stay long under the tree but went home to search out a table fan for him. At first, I thought of going back to the tree with it, but I felt shy or embarrassed to do so, in case my return should be misinterpreted. (By whom? By him? Or, more likely, by myself?) Instead, I waited for the girls to take it to him the next day. They thanked me so profusely that I realized that they were grateful less for the fan than for what they took as a sign of my increased admiration for him.

They hadn't yet succeeded in placing his manuscript, and they had now decided that the only way forward was to publish it themselves. They had brought me a copy of it, together with a flyer they had put together to send to people who might be able to afford a limited edition of the book; and, since there weren't many of these in their own acquaintance, they had come to ask me for a list of possible subscribers. This request made, the girls went to deliver their little cooked dishes before they grew cold. I took out my old address book, which was full of names I had expected never to need again. And when I saw those names and thought of the life I had lived for so many years—the fund-raiser banquets in hotel ballrooms, the catered dinners, and the ladies' lunches—and then looked at the handbill designed on Maeve's computer, with a passport-like photograph of Dr. Chacko, I was struck by the incompatibility of that past with this present. At the same time, I couldn't help being amused by the idea of those people—or their social secretaries—receiving this flyer, and discarding it in the wastebasket, along with all the other crazy mail. And, if they were actually to read the text, what would they make of it? No more than I could. Here I stopped transcribing names to leaf through the manuscript itself, in the hope of gaining some glimmer of understanding. There was none; it remained turgid and incomprehensible to me and in no way reflected the man I had seen lying indolently under a tree.

I put the list in an envelope with a note to say that I hoped it would be useful to him.

I knocked on his door and, receiving no answer, pushed it open. The cottage was empty, not only of him but of any presence whatsoever: there was nothing except my abandoned furniture and the fan I had given him—no photographs, no pictures, nothing personal. I put the envelope on the table and left quickly, as though I were doing something underhanded.

My instinct turned out to be correct: the next day, Betty came to see me, looking grave and holding the list in her hand. "Where's Maeve?" I asked, for it was unusual for one to come without the other. Betty smiled at me, though sadly: "Maeve is as grateful to you as I am, for the list, but she's hurt. She so loves to do things for him. Sometimes at night she makes me drive her here, just so she can leave a little gift for him."

I said, "And now she's hurt because the gift of the list was mine and not hers?"

"Poor Maeve, her heart's too full of love. She's an orphan, you know. She was found on the steps of one of the Sister Marie-Jo Homes. She has no idea who left her there. And, after the orphanage, foster homes. I won't tell you about those—why should you hear such things. . . . Maeve has these strong feelings. Maybe they're wrong; probably they are. What she's always loved best is to leave anonymous gifts for him. It was the sweetest thought for her that he wouldn't know—"

"That you were helping him with the manuscript?"

"But now he does know. He's seen your list, so he knows we're looking for subscribers."

She appeared to accept my apology, but from that time on something changed between me and the girls. This was true principally of Maeve, who seemed no longer quite to trust me—or was it that she didn't trust me with him? It was that same day that I entered into a new relationship with Dr. Chacko. For the first time, he came to the porch where I sat with my evening drink. When I invited him to join me, he did so at once. He settled into a chair, and when I offered him a lemonade he indicated my silver cocktail shaker. I told him what was in it, and he said he'd have that. It was quite a potent Martini, but it seemed nothing new to him. After taking a sip, he thanked me for the list I had compiled.

"Are you looking forward to having the book published?" I asked.

He made a vague gesture—of an indifference that seemed to express something of his personality. I asked, "Don't you think it ought to be published?"

"What do you think?"

He had turned fully toward me. If he was, as I had been told, part Indian and part Russian, I couldn't see anything to suggest either. He was too dark to be Anglo-Saxon, and his teeth were very strong and white, the most alive thing in his lean face. He spoke English fluently—more than fluently. Under the layers acquired through much moving around in the world, there remained—like a canal still flowing in the oldest part of a city—the flat accent of the English Midlands. I had noticed this at his workshop, where he had deliberately stressed it—as though its homely and provincial sound would bring his message closer to the earth.

When he felt that he had waited long enough for my opinion of his manuscript, he interpreted my silence as unfavorable. He admitted that it was hard labor for him to write, like birth pangs: "Thoughts trying to get themselves born—except I don't have many thoughts."

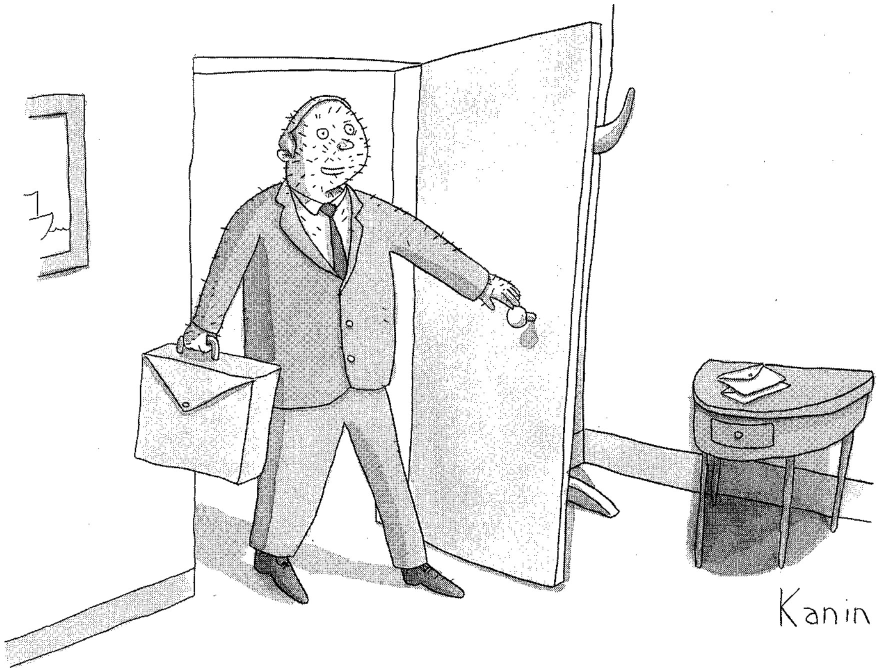
He laughed with those magnificent teeth, at himself and at me, as if I might not believe him. But I did believe him. I'd seen him at his workshop, where he seemed to operate not through thoughts or words or ideas but just by being as he was.

Over the course of that summer, he joined me several more times for drinks on the porch. When the season changed, we sat by the fireplace in my living room, and we carried on this practice throughout that year and the beginning of the next. But it wasn't until the second summer that he joined me for a meal. Unlike the girls, and probably many others who attended his workshop, he wasn't a vegetarian. He thoroughly enjoyed a veal cutlet, and the wine we drank with it; also the candles in my silver candelabra and their reflection on the mahogany table.

Even on the days when he ate with me, I saw the girls going to the cottage with their covered dishes. At the end of one of our meals, I asked him what he did, on such nights, with the food they had cooked for him. He said that he ate it. "If I didn't," he explained, "they'd discover it the next day when they come to bring more. It's their kind nature. There's nothing I can do about it."

One evening, finding the cottage empty, they came up to the house to see if I knew where he was. At first, we didn't notice them, standing silently in the doorway, holding their dishes, but, as soon as we did, he took charge like a good host. He drew out chairs for them; he gestured toward the table: "There are some wicked things here that you won't want, but what if"—he turned to me—"two more plates, would it be possible?" And it was he who uncovered their dishes and served them. "What delicious smells, and may I?" He dipped in a fork and, tasting, confirmed that the food was, indeed, delicious. Despite all this, he didn't quite succeed in overcoming my embarrassment and whatever were their much stronger feelings. After a while, I managed to contribute some small talk, and so did Betty, both of us halfheartedly. As for Maeve, she just stared down at her plate, trying, perhaps, to hide the tears that were trickling into her untouched food.

Later that summer, Betty told me that my list of potential subscribers had proved useless. Now she had a new suggestion, which was that I should underwrite the publication of the manuscript. She made it sound like a good business proposition, pointing out that in no time royalties would be coming in, whereupon I would be the first person to be reimbursed. Maeve didn't say anything; she only traced her toe over the floor, looking down at it so as not to see my face or let me see hers. This was Maeve's way with me now; and on sub-



"We got the cactus account!"

sequent visits, while Betty and I went over the details of the publication, Maeve always wandered off outside by herself, making it clear that she wanted no part of any discussion with me.

During these warm months, my evening walk sometimes took me as far as the waterfall at the edge of my property. The precipitous climb to the rock from which it fell was no longer easy for me, but I enjoyed the solitude there, the moss-covered stones, the trees bending toward the arc of the water. One day, I saw a figure within that arc, sheathed in its iridescence and turning in its spray: it was Dr. Chacko, naked and singing as he soaped himself. His towel and a pair of rubber flip-flops lay on a rocky ledge far enough away not to get wet. Before I could leave, he emerged, still singing and naked; if he saw me, he gave no sign of it until he had reached his towel and wrapped it around himself.

Nimbly, on bare feet, carrying his shoes, he climbed the rocks that separated us and sat down beside me, drops still sparkling on his thighs and his chest. As far as I could make out over the roar of the water, he was telling me how much he enjoyed coming here for his shower—though, of course, he didn't feel the same way in the winter. Was he intending to spend another winter with us? I wondered then. By "us," I meant those of us who were united in our care of him, except that now, apparently, I stood accused of having taken more than my fair share. It was so ridiculous! And, seemingly prompted by the same thought, he said that very word—"Ridiculous"—as we got up to walk together toward the house. "But it's always happening," he went on, "and it's always my fault. I should have told them. Why wouldn't I have told them? There's nothing wrong in it."

"You mean in eating meat?"

"And in your being my friend. Careful." He lifted a prickly branch nodding over our narrow path. I hadn't mentioned Maeve, but, in the way he had of taking up one's unspoken thoughts, he continued, "It's sad that she's an orphan, but there are some orphans who grow up quite happy and carefree. When I was younger, very young, I used to look in the mirror: 'Who is this?' I didn't even know my real name—Chacko comes from the parents who adopted me for a while. They were Indian, but they lived in the U.K., in a very dull town, and at seventeen I made my way elsewhere. I'd been reading the old Russian authors, and I thought all Russians were saints or swindlers, but when I went there I found no one like that; so I worked my way to Baku, and from there farther east. . . . A long story, a long odyssey."

He didn't tell me any more of it that day (or any other day, now that I come to think of it). Instead, he plucked one of his melodies out of the air, some strange tune from far away.

He did stay through the winter, and through the spring, and then another year had passed and it was summer again. In the meantime, Betty had seen his book through production and had made it into a very handsome volume. She watched me examining it, while Maeve stood by, gazing at her own toe circling the carpet. That evening, I sat down seriously with the book, but I still understood very little; actually, nothing.

Carrying the book, I went to see him the next morning. He was sitting on the doorstep of the cottage, carving a piece of wood. He invited me to sit beside him, and when I did I had again that feeling of intimacy I'd had lying next to him under the tree. An innocent intimacy, enhanced by the way he was carving, like a boy whittling a stick. He told me that woodwork was just a hobby for him now, but once it had been useful—when he had fixed shelves and done minor repairs. It was his only skill, he said, since he hadn't had much education. Then I did ask about the book, pointing at the title page, where his name was printed—with "Ph.D." attached to it.

"I bought it," he said. "Not actually I, but a lady who liked to hear me talk.

SUMMER EVENING BY THE WINDOW WITH PSALMS

Close scrutiny of the past.
How my soul yearns within me like those souls
in the nineteenth century before the great wars,
like curtains that want to pull free
of the open window and fly.

We console ourselves with short breaths,
as, after running, we always recover.
We want to reach death hale and hearty,
like a murderer sentenced to death,
wounded when he was caught,
whose judges want him to heal before
he's brought to the gallows.

I think, how many still waters
can yield a single night of stillness
and how many green pastures, wide as deserts,
can yield the quiet of a single hour
and how many valleys of the shadow of death do we need
to be a compassionate shade in the unrelenting sun.

I look out the window: a hundred and fifty
psalms pass through the twilight,
a hundred and fifty psalms, great and small.
What a grand and glorious and transient fleet!

I say: the window is God
And the door is his prophet.

—*Yehuda Amichai*

(*Translated, from the Hebrew, by Robert Alter.*)

There's a small college in India that sells Ph.D.s. B.A.s and M.A.s, too, if that's all you want. . . . It never earned me a living. For that I had to do other things—when I really needed money, for my wife and kids." He was silent for a while, and so was I. Then he went on, "Three of them, all grown up now. I miss them, but they're doing all right. A couple of them are married. They may already have children of their own. I miss my wife, too, occasionally. She's with someone else now. I liked her—I still do, though she never understood a word of anything I said or wrote. . . . Do you?" he asked me, but I didn't have to answer, for he had opened the book and was leafing through it, reading a sentence here and there as if he had never seen it before. Then he shook his head and laughed. He had a rather whinnying laugh, like a horse; I liked his singing better. "Probably only God knows what it's all about. . . . But there are others—others," he said, and just then the girls' car drew up, "who think it's me who understands, and so I must be God." He whinnied again, and waved at them, and Betty waved back. But Maeve was looking at me—at where I sat close beside him on the narrow doorstep; and from that day her hostility toward me entered a new phase.

There were days of such unpleasant heat that summer that it became impossible, Betty told me, to continue the workshop in its present quarters. She proposed a solution. The first part of her solution consisted of taking a collection from the members to hire a bus to bring them to the country. The second part involved me, or, rather, my grounds, where the workshop was to be held. "They needn't come in the house at all," Betty promised, adding, in her truthful way, "except to use the toilet. They'll sit under the trees—he'll talk to them—and they'll be happy, peaceful."

And that was more or less how it happened. They arrived in the late afternoon and fanned out for a while, admiring the flowering trees, breathing in the fragrant air. By the time he came out to talk to them, the shadows were long and cool. He had them sit under one of the trees, the same one beneath which he often lay, looking up into the leaves. They looked only at him—though without the intensity I had sensed in that rented room where they were squashed close together. Now each had space to breathe, to inhale his message. I watched from the porch. For me, there was something almost legendary about the scene—the earnest seekers gathered around their teacher, drawing inspiration from him and from their surroundings. Lively households rustled and stirred within the trees. A chipmunk scurried across the path with a nut in its mouth. And, as the sun contracted, a deer came out of the distant woods and stood, shy but fearless, against a sky that was partly rose-tinted and partly gold. Everyone was, as Betty had predicted, peaceful, serene. No one seemed to be aware that Maeve had got up from the group and was circling it, the way a wasp would.

They didn't come again. The workshops resumed in New York, but not for long. I learned about the great upheaval only by piecing it together from Betty's reluctant account. Still, it was easy to imagine how, in that cramped and overcrowded room, simmering in the dog-day heat, the smallest spark could have caused an explosion. Betty admitted that she had known from early that morning that Maeve was not herself. Or, rather, that it was one of the days when she was only part of herself, the part that childhood trauma had drained of her natural sweetness. Betty had tried to dissuade her from going, but Maeve had insisted, with that stubborn, closed face that I had begun to think characteristic of her. Betty had settled her on a chair among the disabled, but it was only a few moments into the lecture that Maeve began her disturbance. At first, all she shouted was "No!" Then "Lies! Lies and fakery!" Maybe if Betty had succeeded in removing her at this stage the others might have settled back into their concentration. But, wedged between people on the floor, Betty couldn't reach her, and Maeve spun further out of control, shouting, "Ask him! Why doesn't anyone ask him!" Disconcerted by these wild shouts, the disciples turned their attention from their teacher to Maeve. Jerked out of a deep tranquillity, they reacted in shock and frustration. And Maeve worked them up, along with herself. "Ask him!" she shouted. "Ask him about the one he drinks with—and eats meat!" Then the room erupted. The cripple raised his crutch at her; others tried to pull her off her chair. By the time Betty managed to reach her, her frock was torn at the shoulder. She struggled against Betty, too—maybe she didn't recognize her, confused her with the rest; although, Betty admitted, Maeve had sometimes fought against her in this way in the past. Betty put her arms around her to lead her out. Halfway down the stairs, Maeve was still struggling to free herself, sobbing and yelling, "Ask him what else he does with her!" No one followed them; the door upstairs was shut against them while the lecture continued.

The girls no longer brought covered dishes for him, and he no longer cycled to the station for the train to New York. This made me suspect that the ugly uproar may have caused a split among the members; or perhaps he himself, for reasons of his own, had terminated the workshop, like those in England and in other places. I realized that this idea had always been at the back of my mind: that everything in his life was transient.

Now, on my evening walks, I didn't stumble over him under his tree, because I knew to expect him there; I never lay down with him again, but I sat beside him and we talked a bit. Strangely, I had become more shy with him than before. I even hesitated now to invite him in for a meal.

One day, Betty drove up to my house. She had brought all the unsold copies of Dr. Chacko's book, which was almost the entire edition. Only a few copies had been bought by some workshop students who had managed to come up with the price; efforts to place them on consignment in bookstores had been unsuccessful. "Where shall I put them?" Betty asked, staggering with armfuls of them up the steps of the porch. It's not easy to accommodate more than five hundred books without prior arrangement, so they had to be piled on chairs, sofas, tables, wherever there was a surface. I helped her carry them in, and, when we had finished, she accepted a fresh lemonade. As she relaxed a little, I ventured to ask about Maeve.

Her face softened, as it always did at

mention of Maeve. "We're past the worst of it, thank the Lord. . . . Put yourself in her place—someone who's been betrayed so bitterly in the past."

I said, "I suppose everyone has been, at some point in their past." This was as far as I ever went in speaking to her about mine.

Anyway, it wasn't me she wanted to talk about. "Maeve loved and trusted him, and shouldn't have. What do we know about him? Only what he's told us. Are you going to let him stay in the cottage?"

I said, "He's no trouble to me."

She clamped her lips tight for a moment before continuing: "Not that I listen to gossip, but they say he was in prison in Bangkok for two years before being deported. But people will say anything, so who knows what to believe or not to believe. . . . Well, thanks for the lemonade—it was a real treat on a day like this."

"And thank you for the books."

"Oh, no. Those are yours. You paid for them."

That day, I overcame my embarrassment, or whatever it was that had prevented me from inviting him to dinner. He laughed when he saw his books piled around the house. He said, "It looks like I've really taken you over here." But that was untrue—he had never encroached on me or asked for anything.

Since my table and chairs were occupied, we sat on the porch with plates on our laps and glasses at our feet. For the first time, I asked him about the workshop. He said, "People move on. I move on, too." As he did so often, he answered my question before I had asked it. "There's always somewhere. One gets used to it."

I said, "But wouldn't you rather stay?"

"If there are people who wish me to stay."

Evidently, he didn't intend to continue this conversation, and I also realized that there was no need. It was cool outside now, in the night air. Glowworms glittered below, stars above. Instead of talking, he began to hum one of his songs. Was this his teaching? To say nothing? To want and need nothing? All the same, I couldn't help myself—I had to ask. "So you think you won't want the cottage much longer?"

He stopped humming. "Why? Are you looking for a new tenant? If so, I hope he'll pay you better than I."

"You're not my tenant."

"No, of course not. Tenants pay rent. But I should do something for you. Look at this," and he held up an early autumn leaf that had fluttered onto the porch. "You won't be able to sit out here much longer—with luck, another month—and after that you'll need your chairs and tables back. You'll have to get rid of the books. They're useless, anyway, if you don't understand them."

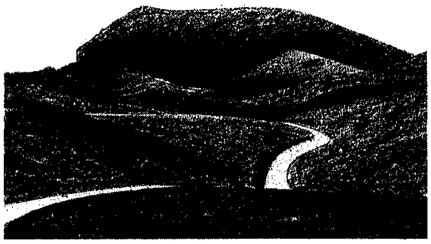
"One day I shall."

"And till then? Are you going to eat and sleep with them? I tell you what I'll do. I'll build some shelves for them, so that they won't be in your way, and you can have your house back."

Did he mean my house or the cottage? I couldn't ask again, and he just went on talking about the shelves and how we would need to buy wood—good quality, he said, to go with the rest of the house.

He came to take measurements, and then we drove to a building-supply depot in town. He filled two huge shopping carts, and, when it came time to pay, he wouldn't let me sign my credit-card slip before he had checked the amounts. The next day, he set up the trestle table we had bought under a tree, and there he worked with his shirt off, and singing. I carried out sandwiches at lunchtime, and we ate them under the tree. The air was filled with the scent of sawdust, of grass, and of the wilted leaves that had begun to fall, and also the whiff of perspiration rising from the tangled hair on his bare chest. It was the last, the very last days of summer, with dusty, drooping trees, and flowers going to seed, and flying insects fierce in their final throes.

I was eager to pay him for his work, and, while I was still wondering how to raise the subject, he presented me with a bill. He had itemized the hours he had spent working for me so far, and it came to a substantial amount. But, anyway, whatever I paid was worth it for me. I continued to make sandwiches for his lunch and to join him in eating them. More and more leaves had begun to fall, some on his naked back, and some scattered in his hair, where they remained like Bacchanalian vine leaves. Sometimes a stronger breeze brought down a shower of them which fell on both of us, veiling us in gold.



One day, he said, "Betty came to ask when I would be moving out of the cottage."

"What did you say?"

"I said I have a job to finish here."

Several days of rain followed, and since he could no longer work outdoors we carried the shelves into the house. The woodwork was almost finished, and he had begun to varnish and polish. As I realized that the work was drawing to a close, I thought up more jobs for him: a spice rack in the kitchen, towel rails in the laundry room. I kept on finding things I needed to have done around the house, including some that I didn't need at all.

When I had almost run out of ideas, he himself had a suggestion. He said that it made him uneasy to see my silver so insecure in the breakfront, where any intruder could smash the glass. In the dining room, there was a niche large enough, he told me, for a cabinet that he could build for me, with a lock to secure my silver inside. We went out to buy more wood, and he set to work at once. He explained the kind of lock he needed, and as I drove to the store I thought that maybe it was not only I but he, too, who was trying to prolong his stay—if, that is, he intended to stay.

On my way back, I drove past the girls' house. It was wide open, windows and doors flowing out into the front yard. It was full of toys, and playing with them were the usual children the girls gathered up from the town—orphans, or fugitives from bad homes. The girls had set up a swing, and Maeve was sitting on it, shouting "Higher!" while two laughing children pushed her. Betty saw me in my car and waved and called, "Isn't this fun!"

But, when she came over to talk to me

through the car window, the first thing she said was "Is he still in the cottage?"

"He's working on my bookshelves."

"If he's working for you, why don't you let him stay in the house? There's plenty of room for the two of you. He hardly needs a whole cottage to himself."

"Then who else would stay there?"

"You've seen our kids—how happy they are just in the few inches of space we have for them. At your place, in that air, those trees—and the seasons! Rain and wind and snow! Beautiful."

I started the car, and, when I revved the engine, she had to talk louder: "It's not good for people to stay alone. I know what I was before I met Maeve, and I know what she was, but together—" Here she shouted after the moving car. "The two of us together, that's a life!"

The cabinet took longer than the other jobs he had done for me. He became so involved in the work that he continued after our supper and after I had gone to bed. I listened to him hammering downstairs, and one night I got up to see how he was getting on. He was fitting in the shelves, but he seemed dissatisfied and took them out again to plane them. I stood silently watching him. When he turned around, he looked at me in the doorway, in my long nightdress, which was of delicate silk, fit for a bride. I remembered the thoughts that Betty had tried to put in my head—had actually put there—and the possibility that he could read them, as he so often could, both embarrassed and excited me. I went back upstairs and continued to lie in bed listening to his hammering. When it stopped, I heard him moving around downstairs and wondered what he was doing. I wanted to go and see for myself. But the same embarrassment overcame me, and I stayed in bed listening, and that, too, was nice, to hear him moving inside my house.

When I woke in the morning, the sun was pouring a sea of sparkling autumn light into the room. I put on a robe and tied it as I hurried down the stairs, thinking that I might still find him there. But he had gone. He had completed his work and swept up the wood shavings, and altogether left everything neat. The cabinet was finished; it sat in its niche. The lock was on, so I knew that he had moved the silver inside and locked it up for security. One of his books was lying on the dining table with a note on it that said, "See page 420." I opened it to that page and found the key inside. I scanned the page to see if there was a secret message for me in the text, but there was not. I read it again, but still detected no message. I tried the preceding page and the following one, with the same result. But the key was definitely there. I unlocked the new cabinet and found that I had been mistaken. He had not yet moved the silver inside. But the breakfront was empty, and so were the drawers in my sideboard, in which I had kept my silverware.

The cottage, too, was empty and had been swept with a broom, which he had left leaning against the wall. The only thing missing here was the table fan. The first thing I wondered was how he had managed to transport everything on that rickety mount of his. I imagined him fastening the fan to the bike, then, like a real burglar, slinging the silver in a sack over his shoulder, and standing at dawn on the highway to thumb a ride from a long-distance truck on its way to some far-off, unknown, undiscoverable destination.

The girls soon transformed the cottage into a playroom. The children painted fantastic murals of jungle animals and spaceships; Betty baked cookies while Maeve wove a rug on a loom, which had stood unused in the attic of their old house. As for me, I've been studying his book. I start at the beginning and read right through to the end; then, in the hope of understanding more, I go back and repeat the process. Maybe this is what he had in mind for me, in return for what he took. The loss of my silver may not be a loss at all, but simply the fee charged for my education. Sometimes, though not always, I think that it was worth it. Meanwhile, as Betty anticipated, each season here brings us its own joys: ghosts in bedsheets at Halloween, stars and angels on the Christmas tree, and, in the depths of winter, when the snow has fallen thick and fast, toboggans flying down the slope behind the cottage and into the hollow that in the spring will be covered with new grass and sprinkled with small flowers, bluebells and forget-me-nots. ♦

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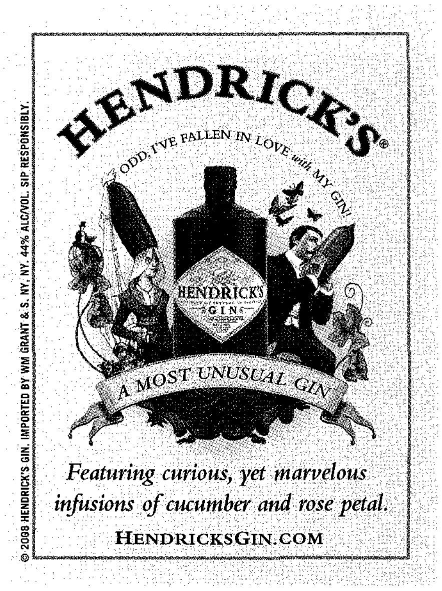
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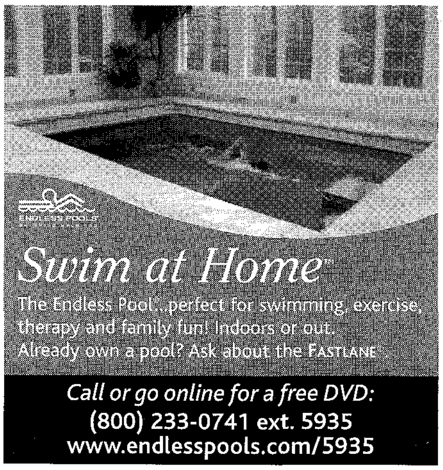
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THE CRITICS

THE CURRENT CINEMA

EURO VISIONS

"Mamma Mia!" and "Journey to the Center of the Earth."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Like many people, I was under the impression that the new Meryl Streep film was called "Mamma Mia." The correct title is, in fact, "Mamma Mia!," and, in one keystroke, the exclamation mark tells you all you need to know about the movie. Billy Wilder tried the same trick with "Avanti!," in 1972, but that felt like late Chekhov compared with this ferocious onslaught of obligatory good cheer. From the opening minutes, in which Sophie (Amanda Seyfried), a young pleasure seeker on the eve of her wedding, greets her two bridesmaids as they arrive on a jetty, yelping with delight like unweaned puppies, you can tell that everyone in this story is just going to have the *best* time. *Ever.*

Sophie resides on a Greek island—an island like any other, where gnarled old ladies drop whatever they're doing in the olive grove and tunefully join in on nineteen-seventies Swedish pop songs. She lives there with her mother, Donna (Meryl Streep), who has been running a shabby hotel for many years, and who wears dungarees to signal her lack of reliance on a man. Long ago, however, there were plenty of men; one crazy summer, in particular, provided three in a row. Any one of them could have been the father of Sophie, and she, needing somebody to walk her down the aisle, has invited all three contenders to the wedding: Sam (Pierce Brosnan), Harry (Colin Firth), and Bill (Stellan Skarsgård). Little do they suspect the horrors that lie in store.

The script is by Catherine Johnson, who also wrote the stage play on which it is based, although "play" may not be the word. It was more like a theatrical kebab, onto which she skewered as many Abba songs as humanly possible: a clever move, given that half the people in the Western world have the Abba sound stuck itchily in their ears, whether they like it or not. The show has proved an international wow, so much so that, rather than being subtly adapted for the screen, it has been hauled there pretty much intact—along with the director, Phyllida Lloyd, who oversaw the original London production, and who has never directed a feature film before. How else does one explain the theatrical quality of the light on the terrace of Donna's hotel, which has a curious apricot glaze, bearing no relation to the bright, breathable atmosphere of any known Greek island? The credits insist that "Mamma Mia!" was filmed on Skiathos and Skopelos, yet even the exteriors have the feel of interiors, with both leads and locals behaving in ways that seem not so much clichéd as marked out and preordained. It's like the Hellenic answer to "The Truman Show."

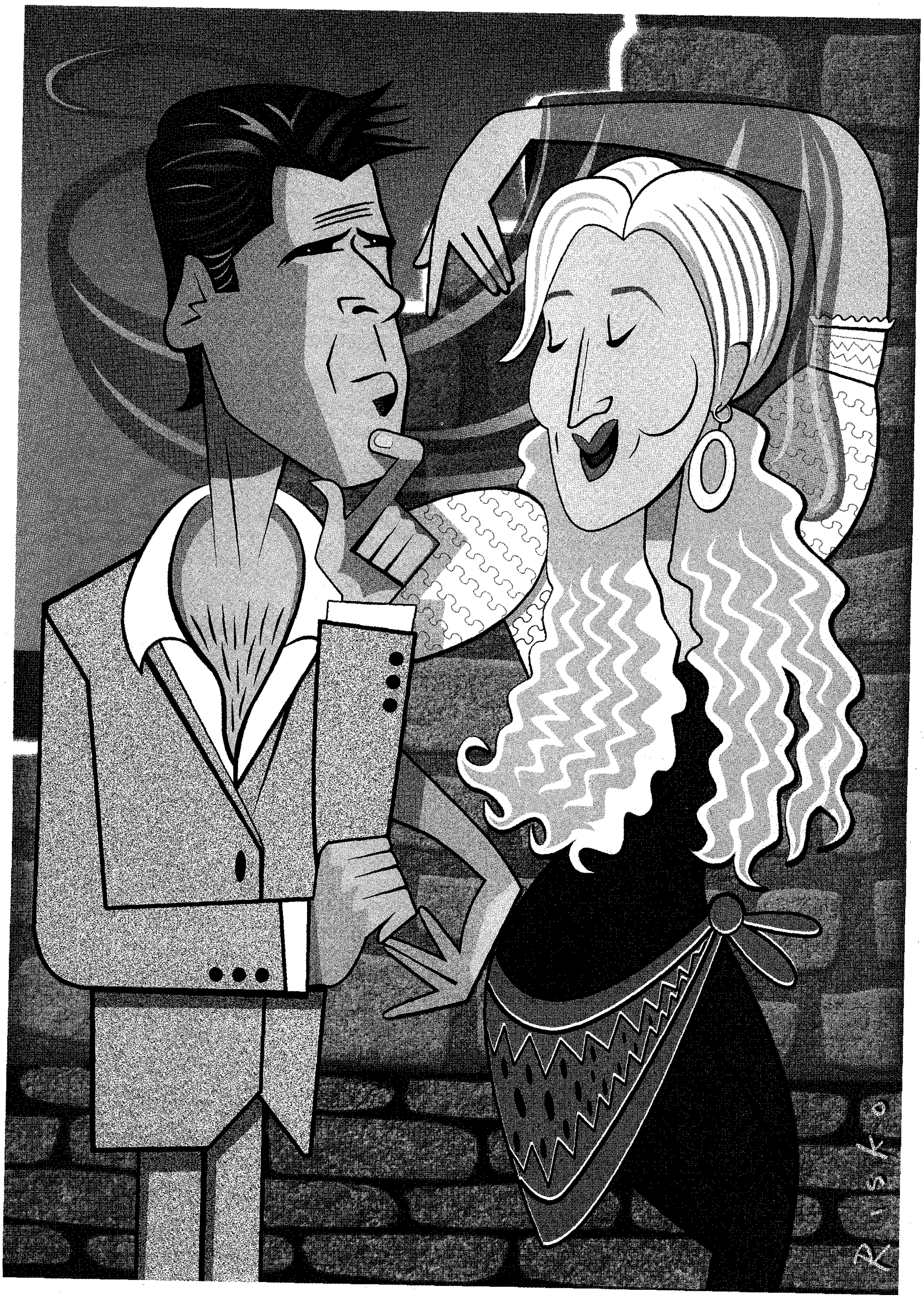
To an extent, this is a hazard of the modern musical. As audiences, we have long since fallen from that state of grace in which the sight of Debbie Reynolds bidding "Good morning" to Gene Kelly in song rather than in speech struck us as a natural option. Any attempt to regain that paradise is doomed to falter. When Julie Walters—playing a boozy friend of Donna's, asked along to the jamboree—suddenly declares, "If you change your mind," to Stellan Skarsgård, we laugh at her presumption, though ours is not the laughter of innocence but the inferior laughter of knowingness. We recognize the first line of Abba's "Take a Chance on Me" and duly adopt the brace position, steadying ourselves for yet another mangling of yet another hit.

The legal definition of torture has been much aired in recent years, and I take "Mamma Mia!" to be a useful contribution to that debate. In a way, the whole film is a startling twist on the black art of rendition: ordinary citizens, often unaware of their own guilt, are spirited off to a secure environment in Eastern Europe, there to be forced into a humiliating and often painful confession of sins past. "I tried to reach for you, but you have closed your mind," in the bitter words of Sam. I thought that Pierce Brosnan had been dragged to the edge of endurance by North Korean sadists in his final Bond film, "Die Another Day," but that was a quick tickle with a feather duster compared with the agony of singing Abba's "S.O.S." to Meryl Streep through a kitchen window. Somebody, either a cheeky Swede or another North Korean, has deliberately scored the number a tone and a half too high, with visible results: swelling muscles along the jawline, tightened throat, a panicky bulge in the eyes. There is no delicate way of putting this, but anyone watching Brosnan in mid-delivery will conclude that he has recently suffered from a series of complex digestive problems, and that the camera has, with unfortunate timing, caught him at the exact moment when he is finally working them out. What has he done to deserve this?

His only crime, in truth, is that of being a good sport. If you are an old pro at song-and-dance routines, then "Mamma Mia!" will go like a breeze—as it does for Christine Baranski, who rolls up as Donna's wicked pal, and whose lusty, beach-bound version of "Does Your Mother Know?" shames the rest of the movie. If, on the other hand, you are a cautious and reactive performer, like Brosnan or Firth (or like Streep herself, the mistress of watchfulness), you grab any

ABOVE: BENOIT JACQUES; OPPOSITE: ROBERT RISKO

Hazard of the modern musical: Meryl Streep and Pierce Brosnan on a Greek island, singing the Abba songbook.


Risko

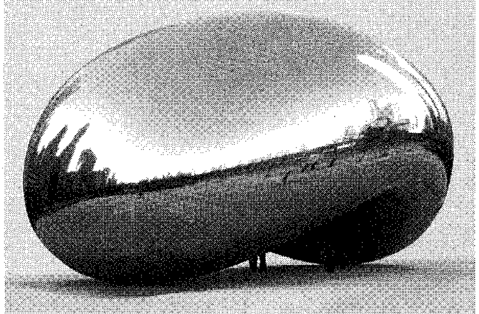
chance to cut loose. Streep has tried this before, with "Death Becomes Her" and "Postcards from the Edge," but I am not convinced, on the strength of the new film, that life becomes her—not this relaxed brand of life, at any rate, which entails bouncing on the bed and strapping herself into thigh-high platform boots. If this great actress is unconvincing as an old hippie, it's because none of us can believe she was ever a young hippie. How, we want to know, did the French Lieutenant's Woman wind up jumping off the dock of the bay?

There are, to be fair, millions of viewers who will relish the sheer unlikelihood of all this. They will cheer on the actors' warbled singing, and the hobbled-donkey style of dancing, precisely *because* it is so amateur and shambolic—because, in short, it reminds them of themselves having a good time. I wish I could share that contagion, but then I really saw only half the movie, having spent the other half staring down at my clenched fists and curled toes in a calvary of embarrassment. This has nothing to do with Abba, the most hook-infested Euro pop ever devised, and I was perfectly happy—well, happy—to sit through the stage show of "Mamma Mia!" Other films, moreover, have proved surprisingly hospitable to Abba; listen to the use of "Dancing Queen" in "Muriel's Wedding" (1994), or to a Brosnan-free "S.O.S." at the end of the Swedish masterpiece "Together" (2000), and marvel at the force of emotion that can be wrung from the higher cheesiness. All credit to Phyllida Lloyd, then, for piling on the songs, sometimes with barely a break; the trouble is that, being in proud possession of a camera, she will insist on sticking it in people's faces as they croon. Study any of the classic musicals, and you see how they pull away from head shots and become meditations on bodies in space and voices on the move, whereas Meryl Streep, given a windy cliff top, a red silk wrap, and "The Winner Takes It All," is obliged to hold still and belt it out like Cassandra calling down ruin on Troy. And poor Brosnan (him again) has to stand in the blast area and listen to her at a distance of eighteen inches, rubbing his chin thoughtfully as if to check when he last shaved.

From there we hop to the climax, to the resolution of Sophie's filial quandary, and to the unheralded revelation that one of her putative fathers may be gay. Just to blur the issue, all three of them proceed to sport multicolored Lurex pants during the final credits, the better to launch into "Waterloo"—the song no plot could contain. Be warned, though: you also have to watch Streep march to the front of the screen, as if to invisible footlights, and scream at us, "Do you want more?" "Thank you, but no," I replied, as politely as I could, but I don't think she heard. Everybody around me was screaming back. They wanted more.

Only in selected cinemas will "Journey to the Center of the Earth" be available in 3-D. Those condemned to view it in two dimensions will be left in mild bewilderment, since many details have been selected for no purpose other than the flaunting of three-dimensional oomph. A trilobitic bug scurries on at the start and waves its enormous feelers in our direction. That, however, is the extent of its performance, and the bug might wonder, like an ingénue asked to remove her clothes, if such exposure was artistically justified. Next up are the yo-yo and the tape measure, both of which come zooming out of the screen, and I can't help thinking of other films that would have been improved by a blast of 3-D; I might not have nodded off during "The Hours," for example, if regularly prodded awake by the giant schnozzle of Virginia Woolf.

Brendan Fraser plays a modern-day professor named Trevor, who descends, via a volcano, into the planet's guts, together with Sean (Josh Hutcherson), his nephew, and Hannah (Anita Briem), just the sort of unattached blond Icelandic tour guide you need in these situations. What ensues is closer to a theme ride than to a motion picture, and its dips into pensive emotion are a waste of footage. Nobody, but nobody, in the audience will care as much about the professor's dead brother as about the live T. rex. Yet most of the movie, directed by Eric Brevig, is as daft, outlandish, and speedy as it needs to be, and, for all its newfangled effects, touchingly old-fashioned in its reverence for the Jules Verne novel that inspired it. "It's all in the book!" the professor cries. When did you last hear that at a theme park? ♦



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BRIEFLY NOTED

Paradise Lost, *by Giles Milton (Basic; $27.95).* In September, 1922, after the Turkish forces of Mustafa Kemal defeated a Greek army that had recklessly occupied the Anatolian city of Smyrna, members of Smyrna's Greek, Armenian, and expatriate communities were killed, raped, and robbed. Soon, a half million people were trapped on the port's narrow wharves, the city in flames behind them; "The streets were stacked with dead," a British officer wrote. Milton weaves the Armenian genocide, the birth of modern Turkey, and the tragic inanities of Versailles into his story, but his focus is the destruction of the multi-ethnic, religiously diverse cosmopolis of Smyrna (now the Turkish city of Izmir). He has a tendency to idolize the Levantines, dynasties of European "merchant princes" who remained oblivious as Greeks and Turks committed atrocities closer and closer to their enclave. Milton's more compelling hero is Asa Jennings, a five-foot-tall Y.M.C.A. ad-

ulance—he bemoans the boorishness of his neighbors—but his loving evocation of the landscapes is stirring, as is his common-sense approach to conservation.

Cost, *by Roxana Robinson (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* Robinson's fourth novel is an engrossing tale of a patrician family's unravelling during a summer in Maine. Julia Lambert is a divorced artist, trying to entertain her oppressive, former neurosurgeon father (he points out everything that's wrong with his daughter's run-down cabin) and her self-effacing mother, who is in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Julia's elder son suspects that his younger brother, Jack, is a heroin addict, and when this turns out to be true an intervention is staged. The family's ugly, dysfunctional history pours out in the process, in sharp contrast with the halcyon setting. Robinson moves nimbly among the numerous characters' mind-sets, and although Julia's meditations on "the long

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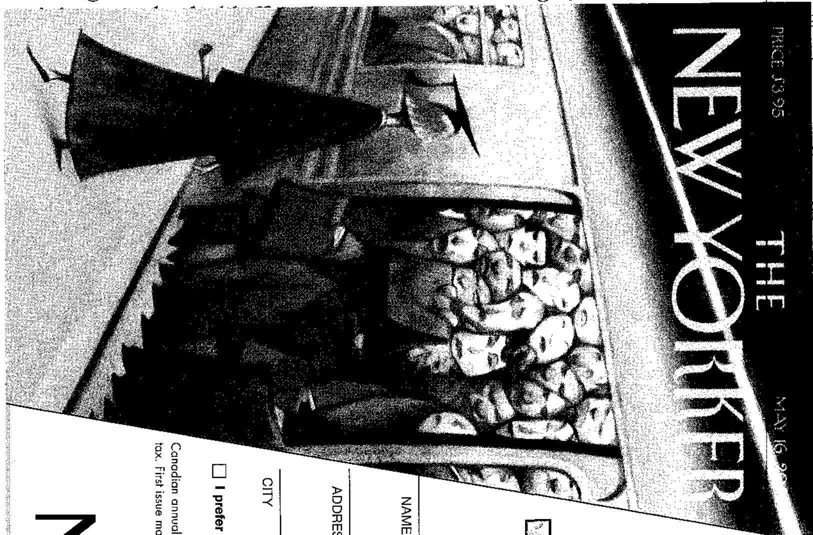

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BOOKS

THE UNFORGOTTEN

Aleksandar Hemon's fictional lives.

BY JAMES WOOD

In Joseph Roth's novel of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, "The Radetzky March," there is an extraordinary scene in which the varied soldiers of that vast, improbable portmanteau parade in Vienna before the Hapsburg emperor, Franz Joseph. Uniformed men stream by, Austrians, Italians, Hungarians, Slovenians, and—most remarkably and most exotically—Bosnians, vivid in their "blood-red fezzes," which seemed to glow, Roth writes, like bonfires lit by Islam in tribute to the Emperor himself. Those blood-red fezzes are all Roth needs to conjure the distant romance of the Bosnian subjects, who disappear from the novelistic pageant as quickly as they flashed by.

Nearly seventy years after "The Radetzky March" was published, Aleksandar Hemon, who was born in Sarajevo and now lives in Chicago, seems to return Roth's compliment when, in his story "The Accordion," he uses the same phrase: Archduke Franz Ferdinand is riding in a carriage through Sarajevo, and he sees "the blood-red fezzes—much like topsy-turvy flower pots with short tassels—and women with little curtains over their faces." The Archduke has an appointment with history: any moment now, he will be assassinated, and the long fuse that ignited the First World War will be lit. But, before that encounter, the Archduke's attention is caught—in Hemon's spirited telling—by a man with an accordion. The instrument is missing a key, and the Archduke idly wonders if one could play a tune without it. The narrator remarks triumphantly that the man with the accordion "was none other than my great-grandfather, freshly arrived in Bosnia from Ukraine." He goes on to tell us that the accordion outlived its owner by fifty years, expiring when his "blind uncle Teodor" threw himself onto a bed where it lay. The story ends with stark abandon: "Uncle Teodor is now stuck in the Serb part of Bosnia. Most of my family is scattered across Canada. This story was written in Chicago (where I live) on the subway, after a long day of arduous work as a parking assistant, A.D. 1996."

Hemon's writing shares with Joseph Roth's an interest in the extremities and borderlands of the Hapsburg Empire, and both writers delight in rich, fantastical metaphor (the fezzes like bonfires and flowerpots). Whether Hemon had Roth in mind or not, his piece of family lore, fanciful yet grounded in political actualities and personal hardship, seems to thumb its Bosnian nose at Roth's romantic Orientalism. Where Roth sees in the Bosnians only color and loyalty, Hemon sees the comfortable disdain of the Archduke for his outlandish subjects. Roth, who was born in Ukraine and came to university in Vienna, was sentimentally nostalgic for an unreal empire, for the livery and insignia of Viennese pomp. Hemon, whose paternal ancestors moved from Ukraine to Bosnia, and who came to America in 1992 for a short visit only to find that the siege of Sarajevo prohibited his return, is complicatedly nostalgic for a real city that he grew up in and left—or that left him, once the war began.

As Roth's work is shadowed by 1914, the moment at which the Empire began to unravel, 1992 comes down again and again like a scimitar of fable in Hemon's work: it was the year that he realized he could not go home, the year that Serbian snipers made Sarajevo their toy theatre. Hemon's fictional creation and almost alter ego Jozef Pronek, who appears in his first book of stories, "The Question of Bruno" (2000), and is the protagonist of his first novel, "Nowhere Man" (2002), arrives in the United States from Sarajevo in January, 1992. The customs officer at J.F.K. flips through his Yugoslav passport "as if it were a gooey smut magazine." No one in America has the slightest conception of where he comes from: the least idiotic hazard a reference to Kundera and Czechoslovakia; others tell him what a great country America is, and suggest that maybe General Schwarzkopf can sort it all out. Young Pronek gets a succession of dismal jobs in Chicago, while squatting in seedy digs with a girl named Andrea and her hideous boyfriend, Carwin:

> Jozef Pronek decided to stay in the United States, possibly for the rest of his life, in the middle of a snowy night, as snowflakes were pressing their crystal faces against the window pane, after Carwin dropped a pot of rotting spaghetti on the floor and said: "Fuck!"

That is characteristically Hemon-like comic deflation, but the verb "decided" may ascribe too much agency. A more piercing sentence, later in the same story ("Blind Jozef Pronek & Dead Souls," much of which first appeared in this magazine), suggests less volition and the portable provincialism of exile. Jozef watches the CNN pictures of his besieged city, but, Hemon writes, "he only watched the images to recognize the people in them":

> Once he thought he saw his father, running down Sniper's Alley, but he couldn't be sure, because the man hid his head behind a folded-up newspaper.

When he arrived here, at the age of twenty-eight, Hemon had what his publisher calls only a "basic command" of English. Eight years later, "The Question of Bruno" appeared, stories written in an English remarkable for its polish, lustre, and sardonic control of register. This conversion is often described as "Nabokovian," and, indeed, Hemon's writing sometimes reminds one of Nabokov's. (Hemon has said that he learned English by reading Nabokov and underlining the words he didn't recognize.) Yet the feat of his reinvention exceeds the Russian's. Nabokov grew up reading English, and had been educated at Cambridge. When his American career began, in 1940, he was almost middle-aged, and had long experience in at least three languages. Hemon, by contrast, tore through his development in the new language with hyperthyroidal speed.

In those eight years, Hemon became

not merely a proficient stylist but a superb one. Sometimes his English has the regenerative eccentricity of the immigrant's, restoring buried meanings to words like "vacuous" and "petrified." A sentence like this one stands at a slight angle to customary English usage: "I piled different sorts of blebby pierogi and a cup of limpid tea on my tray." "Blebby" is wonderful, but, perhaps more wonderful, how many native English speakers would ever describe tea as limpid? Occasionally, he flourishes a lyrically pedantic Nabokovian bloom, as with the "fenestral glasses" a character wears.

But more often he uses his astonishing talent to notice the world with a sarcastic, wily precision that is then put in tension with his love of surreal metaphor. A horse that is pulling the Archduke's carriage drops turds that are "like dark, deflated tennis balls." A shower head looms over a bathtub "like a buzzard head," and pubic hairs are stuck to the side of a toilet bowl "as if climbing up." Jozef Pronek, newly arrived in America, is amazed at how smoothly toilets work, and watches, in his Quality Inn, "how the water at the bottom was enthusiastically slurped in, only to rise, with liquid cocksureness, back to the original level." When he and Andrea have sex, the language captures the erotic ordinariness of the event: "They breathed into each other's faces and let their abdomens adhere. Then their little sex unit fissioned, and she went to the bathroom." And there is much beauty on every page—the "sooty tapestry" of a fellow-traveller's hairy torso, or Pronek's skin first thing in the morning, "soft, with crease imprints, the fossils of slumber."

Hemon's narratives regularly stall and then stutter into magnificent lists of noticed or remembered details, loosely joined by semicolons. (He likes tall tales but has a refreshing lack of interest in conventional novelistic plot.) One has the sense, as in Nabokov's case, of the stylist urgently preserving in exile details that might disappear if unremarked. In his story "Exchange of Pleasant Words," for instance, he writes fondly about a Hemon family reunion in 1991—what the family calls "the Hemoniad"—when two sides, the Hemons and the Hemuns (a branch descended from the narrator's grandfather's brother), are reunited. It is a warm summer day, filled with rustic drinking and eating and much outrageous storytelling. Uncle Teodor, the unofficial family historian, addresses the conclave, mentioning Hemons who, according to him, appear in the Iliad; and a Breton soldier named Alexandre Hemon, who fought with Napoleon; and a Hemon who went to America and got rich. The young Aleksandar Hemon is charged with recording this mythical party on a video camera, has "one drink too many," and eventually collapses. But not before he manages to register the following list of "discontinuous memories":

MILOMIR KOVAČEVIĆ STRAŠNI

The Bosnian-born Hemon is a postmodernist who has been mugged by history.

> The noxious, sour manure stench coming from the pigsty; the howling of the only piglet left alive; the fluttering of fleeting chickens; pungent smoke, coming from moribund pig-roast fires; relentless shuffling and rustle of the gravel on which many feet danced; my aunts and other auntly women trodding the *kolomiyka* on the gravel; their ankles universally swollen, and their skin-hued stockings descending slowly down their varicose calves; the scent of a pine plank and the prickly coarseness of its surface, as I laid my cheek on it and everything spun, as if I were in a washing machine; my cousin Ivan's sandaled left foot tap-tap-tapping on the stage, headed by its rotund big toe; the vast fields of cakes and pastries arrayed on the bed (on which my grandmother had expired), meticulously sorted in chocolate and non-chocolate phalanxes.

One of the most appealing aspects of Hemon's fiction is that he is at once grounded in pungent realities and drawn toward playful fictionalizing. On the one hand, he finishes "The Accordion" with information about his family's diaspora and the news that he wrote it on the subway after a hard day's lowly work, and, on the other, he offers an anecdote about an accordion-playing ancestor that might be entirely fictitious and is grandly unverifiable. He likes to use his family name in his fiction, and to refer recurrently to certain relatives and family histories, but the autobiographical veracity of that fiction seems architectural rather than foundational. More than any other American novelist I can think of, he

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has made a kind of running autobiographical fiction of his actual circumstances—the childhood in Sarajevo, the exile in America, the early hardships in Chicago. He is a fabulist but not really a postmodernist; or, rather, he is a postmodernist who has been mugged by history. When he “lays bare the device” (an old Russian Formalist phrase for the technique of playful fictive self-consciousness), he opens a wound. During “the Hemoniad,” the narrator's mother remarks, “The trouble with the Hemons . . . is that they always get much too excited about things they imagine to be real.” The formulation is canny: a good proportion of reality consists of what we freely imagine; and then, less happily perhaps, we discover that that reality has imagined us—that we are the vassals of our imaginings, not their emperors or archdukes.

Hemon's cunningly ambitious new novel, “The Lazarus Project” (Riverhead; $24.95), is a further installment in his autobiographical fictionalizing. Its narrator, Vladimir Brik, came from Sarajevo to the States in 1992, and describes himself as “a reasonably loyal citizen of a couple of countries.” Like one of the narrators of “Nowhere Man” (and Hemon himself), he has taught English as a second language. His grandfather came to Bosnia from Ukraine. He writes a column about his immigrant experiences, which people like partly because they find “the quirky immigrant language endearing.” At a dinner to celebrate Bosnian Independence Day, Brik meets Susie Schuettler, a board member of the Glory Foundation, which agrees to fund Brik's research. Hereafter, he refers to the largesse of “the Susie grant” (a jokey reference, in part, to Hemon's MacArthur Fellowship).

Brik wants to research an event that took place on March 2, 1908. A Jewish immigrant, Lazarus Averbuch, paid a visit to George Shippy, the chief of the Chicago police, and was shot dead. No one knew why Averbuch was visiting Shippy, or exactly why or how he died, but for many Chicagoans his supposed involvement with anarchist circles solved the mystery: he had obviously intended to assassinate the prime representative of law and order. There was a hysterical fear of anarchism at the time, frothed up by the newspapers—“The war against anarchism was much like the current war on terror,” Brik tells us. The Chicago Historical Society has a number of photographs of Averbuch, and Hemon reproduces them and other photographs throughout his novel, including a shocking one in which a policeman stands behind the recently deceased Averbuch, who appears to be sitting in a chair, his head kept from lolling by the policeman's hands, which are placed on the top of his victim's head and underneath the chin, as if exhibiting a rare archeological find. Averbuch's eyes are not quite closed, his lips are pursed in vague puzzlement, and he looks not dead but, rather, slightly disgruntled at the prospect of being woken.

Hemon is clearly fascinated by the story of this man with the Biblically suggestive name, who survived the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 (in what is now Moldova), and who came with his sister to Chicago, only to be killed by an American policeman. The fragility of the immigrant's status takes on a metaphysical cast in Hemon's work. One of the immigrant narrators of “Nowhere Man” has the feeling that “most of the things in this world would go on existing whether I lived or died. There was a hole in the world, and I fit right into it; if I perished, the hole would just close, like a scar healing.” Vladimir Brik is afraid whenever his American wife is working late at night, “for somehow her absence opened up the possibility that my life and all of its traces had vanished.” Lazarus Averbuch belonged nowhere, and though Brik describes himself as a reasonably loyal citizen of two countries, he is better described as an angry citizen of neither. With a childhood friend from Sarajevo, Brik uses the Susie money to go on a research trip—first to Ukraine, where his grandfather was born, then to Chernivtsi, where Averbuch was briefly in a refugee camp, and then to Kishinev, present-day Chisinau. In Chernivtsi, Brik reflects cynically on identity and its center:

> Everybody imagines that they have a center, the seat of their soul, if you believe in that kind of thing. I've asked around, and most of the people told me that the soul is somewhere in the abdominal area—a foot or so above the asshole. But even if the center is elsewhere in the body—the head, the throat,

> the heart—it is fixed there, it does not move around. When you move, the center moves with you, following your trajectory. You protect that center, your body is a sheath; and if your body is damaged, the center is exposed and weak. Moving through the crowd at the bus station in Chernivtsi, I realized that my center had shifted—it used to be in my stomach, but now it was in my breast pocket, where I kept my American passport and a wad of cash. I pushed this bounty of American life through space; I was presently assembled around it and needed to protect it from the people around me.

Hemon's fiction has always been daring: "Nowhere Man" uses three or maybe four different narrators to rub in the silhouette of Jozef Pronek's complicated life. "The Lazarus Project" is in some ways bolder still. It alternates chapters describing Brik's travels with chapters imagining Lazarus Averbuch's existence in the early twentieth century. It is both a historical fiction and an inquiry into the limits of historical fictionalizing. Where Susan Sontag, in her novel of Polish immigrants, "In America," apologized for the brazenness of historical fiction and then brazenly forgot about her own reservations, the better to produce a skein of intellectual costume drama, Hemon is more systematically skeptical, more philosophical, alternating one kind of experimental fiction (essentially a travelogue) with another (essentially an archival fantasy). Perhaps, though, he remembers his reservations too much, and the narrative moves a bit too essayistically, from argument to counter-argument. Brik is pursuing his "Lazarus Project," Hemon is pursuing *his* "Lazarus Project," and the book's photographs represent another kind of mimetic project, which is one or two projects too many.

One of the reasons the novel feels argumentative is that Brik is so angry—chiefly at America and at his wife, Mary, a neurosurgeon at Northwestern Hospital. Mary, a hardworking Catholic from a provincial American family, is made to represent much of what Brik dislikes about this country since the events of September 11th—a culpable innocence, a benign complacency about intentions and consequences. "She had the bright, open face that always reminded me of the vast midwestern welkin," he says. Anger blackens these pages, and political anger, at that: in some ways, the novel is a 9/11 novel pretending not to be one. Hemon wants us to see the connection between the treatment of anarchists and immigrants in 1908 and the treatment of vulnerable groups now, even at the cost of making this parallel very . . . parallel. For Mary, evil is barely comprehensible, and good intentions matter. Brik tells us that he and his wife argued over the Abu Ghraib pictures. She saw the American prison guards as decent, corrupted kids "acting upon a misguided belief they were protecting freedom, their good intentions going astray." For her Bosnian-American husband, at home in neither place, the good intentions were precisely the problem: "What I saw was young Americans expressing their unlimited joy of the unlimited power over someone else's life and death. They loved being alive and righteous by virtue of having good American intentions." The fictional argument has the feel of a real, remembered one, outside the book.

Angry, Vladimir Brik is rather indistinct; he could use some of Jozef Pronek's bumbling, Pnin-like charm. (In a Ukrainian cemetery, Brik finds the stone of one Oleksandr Pronek, 1967-2002: the two dates representing, respectively, Jozef Pronek's birth and the year of the publication of "Nowhere Man.") Lost, homeless on two continents, Brik is poignant, and the novel is never more moving than when its narrator seems a little unhinged because a little unhoused. In his earlier work, Hemon circled around "King Lear" and Shakespeare's great phrase "unaccommodated man," the naked human animal Lear finds on the heath. Physically and metaphysically unaccommodated, Brik even imagines the Biblical Lazarus as a kind of unaccommodated man—the emblem of all immigrants. When Lazarus was raised by Jesus from the dead, Brik muses, did he remember being dead? Or did he just begin again? "Did he have to disremember his previous life and start from scratch, like an immigrant?" That beginning all over again would be the true Lazarus project. ♦

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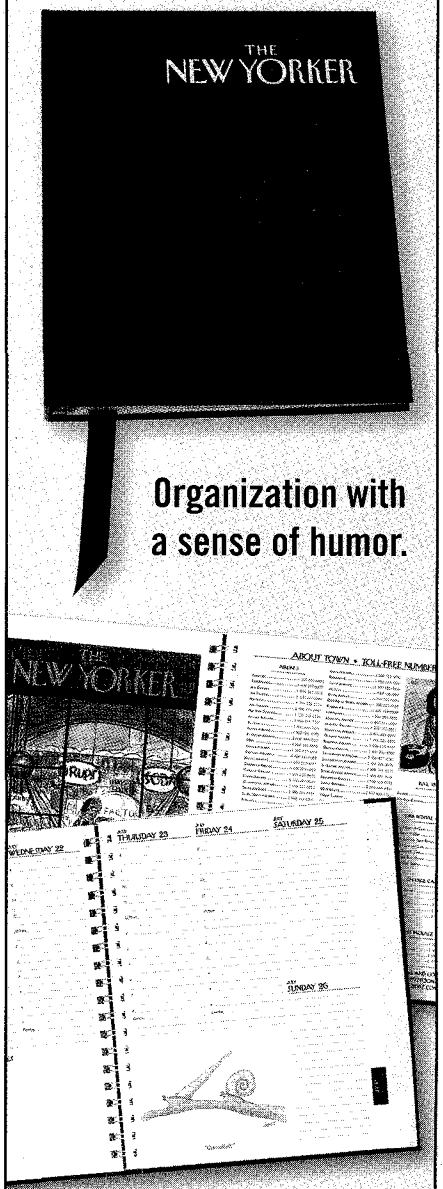

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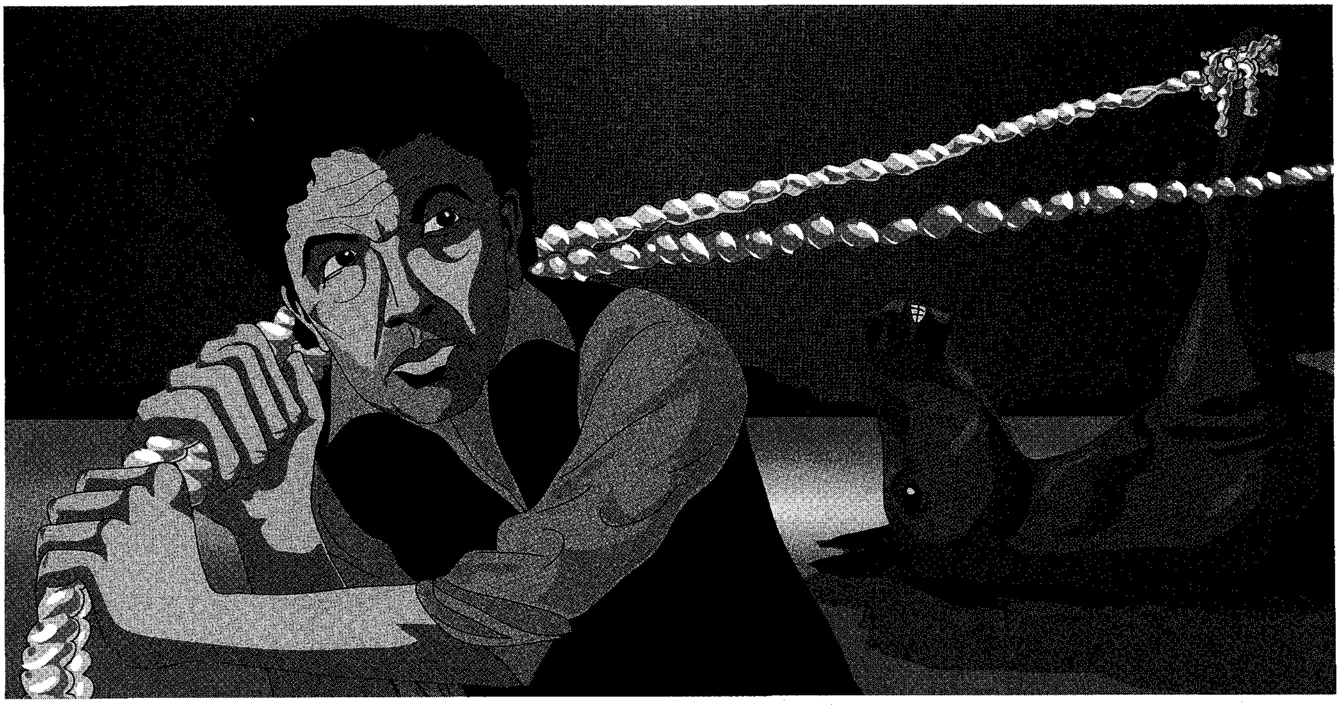
THE THEATRE

FANTASY SUITE

Sam Shepard and Christopher Durang on dashed dreams.

BY HILTON ALS

Sam Shepard's "Kicking a Dead Horse" (at the Public, under the playwright's direction) feels like a summing up of sorts, though not an ending. Given Shepard's protean skill as a writer, a performer, and a director, it's difficult to imagine him coming to the end of anything; he simply moves through the artistic phases and challenges he creates for himself, incorporating what he has done before, while hinting at what is to come.



True West: Stephen Rea as a Manhattan art dealer on a journey of self-discovery in "Kicking a Dead Horse."

MAXIMILIAN BODE

In Shepard's play "Fool for Love" (1983), two lovers quarrel in a foul motel room on the edge of the Mojave Desert. They are in love, but they can't stand the agony that love requires: being known to someone other than yourself. In this and other works, such as "Cowboy Mouth" (written with Patti Smith, in 1971), Shepard debunks the notion of the arrival myth. The majority of his characters seem to be born where they'll die: in a desert of lies, illusion, filial need, and mistrust. There are no covered wagons traversing Shepard's Great Plains; his folk live on the fringes, beneath neon "Vacancy" signs, in rooms that hold, as one stage direction has it, a "fucked-up bed" to rest on. The only creature resting in Shepard's new, one-act play, however, is a dead horse.

In Brien Vahey's brilliant, minimal set, it lies on its side, stiff. In front of it is a pit. Hobart Struther (the apt Stephen Rea) is trying to dig a grave for the fallen animal, which has died on him after inhaling some oats. Now he's stuck alone in the badlands, home to rattlesnakes, coyotes, and death. What is Hobart—who, as it turns out, works in Manhattan, as an art dealer—doing here? He is on a quest, he tells us, if only indirectly. Speaking to himself as much as to the audience, he says, near the beginning of the play:

> You try tracking it back in your raggedy mind to the original notion—the "Eureka" of it. You remember the moment very clearly—how it came to you. Surprising—"AUTHENTICITY." That's what you come up with—the quest for "AUTHENTICITY." As though that were some kind of holy mission in itself.

The beautiful phrase "raggedy mind" draws us into Hobart's sad-sack vision, his ineffectual anger. (Where does kicking a dead horse get you? Nowhere. Yet Hobart can't stop doing just that.) Rea has a long history of working with Shepard—"Kicking a Dead Horse" is one of three plays that Shepard has written with him in mind—and, with his expressive voice and restrained gestures, he illustrates the playwright's language perfectly. He's a clown, but not a Beckett clown. (Rather, his sweetness and regret recall another monologue about dashed dreams: Eugene O'Neill's "Hughie.") Rea has no trouble making us see that, whatever the action onstage, Hobart's consciousness—his frustrated hopes, his befuddlement—is the real drama. What Shepard is exploring here is the difficult and perhaps futile nature of dreaming—the writer's work—and how to make dreams worth it, not only for the artist but for his audience. Hobart admits that his "holy mission" seems little more than "a haunted, ghostly idea to me. . . . At least nowadays—days with age hanging off me like dry moss." Every writer works in the fuzzy territory between fiction and autobiographical truth. In "Kicking a Dead

Horse," which contains some of the most poetic and metaphysical writing Shepard has produced since the seventies, the playwright reconfigures himself—a Midwestern boy who dreamed of a West that no longer exists, if it ever existed—into the form of a man who dreamed of a different kind of life for himself, before ending up lost in the brush, another gone critter in the sad purple light.

Christopher Durang—like Jonathan Swift, that other satirist with Irish roots known for taking the piss out of the quotidian—finds his most satisfying targets in institutions that are inherently theatrical. In Durang's mean and meaningful one-act comedy "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You" (1979), the heroine's bitterness about the children she instructs in catechism is of a piece with her angry personal rumblings:

> I come from a large family. My father was big and ugly, my mother had a nasty disposition and didn't like me; and there were 26 of us. It took three hours just to wash the dishes, but Christ hung on that cross for three hours and *He* never complained.

Naturally, what makes "Sister Mary" such a scream is the way the not so good Sister pits herself against the Good Shepherd in the Extreme Martyr Makeover Contest—and, in her opinion, at least, wins. In 1981, "Sister Mary" was paired with "The Actor's Nightmare," another Durang one-act, which embodies the performer's worst fear: suddenly being forced to star in a play that he has never even read.

Durang's two points of reference—the Catholic Church and the American theatre—are an astonishingly good fit for his cogent dissections of power and illusion and our collective abuse of both. His writing, as taut as David Mamet's, eschews naturalism and delights in its own self-consciousness. One of the chief pleasures of watching his 1985 play, "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" (now in a Roundabout Theatre Company revival, at the Laura Pels), is closing your eyes from time to time and simply listening to this finely constructed work. Divided into thirty-three pointed scenes, the play follows the marriage of Bette Brennan (Kate Jennings Grant) and Boo Hudlocke (the understated Christopher Evan Welch). From the moment we're introduced to the couple, on their wedding day, posing for an unseen photographer with members of their respective families—"God bless Bette and Boo and Skippy, Emily and Boo, Margaret, Matt and Betsy Booey, Mommy, Tommy, too," they practically shout at the audience—we're aware of Bette's strained will and Boo's sad resignation. Bette is determined to be a perfect wife with the perfect brood, while the sensitive Boo will emulate his father, by becoming a drunk, and perhaps a lout as well.

In the years following their wedding, Bette and Boo do have a child, Matt (Charles Socarides), who announces the titles of the scenes, and sometimes amusingly narrates what the characters are doing in the pauses between them. By literally standing away from the action for most of the play, Matt not only identifies himself as different from his hysterical parents but brings us closer to their inner workings, which they themselves can't see, let alone articulate. Among other things, "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" is about the failure of language. (Bette's father, who has suffered a stroke, is unable to form sentences and, when prodded, spews out verbal garbage that no one wants to clean up—especially not his dithery, self-absorbed wife.) Bette can express her rage and her need for control only by getting pregnant again and again—chasing her fantasy of the model family, whether or not Boo shares it. She can't hear what anyone else has to say. That all the babies she has after Matt are stillborn is one of the play's set pieces—and a comment on her stunted spirituality.

Grant and Welch, as Bette and Boo, couldn't be more grating, or more touching, which is as it should be. But Walter Bobbie's direction of the supporting cast is strange: rather than look for the emotion beneath Durang's absurdism, he has his actors competing to accentuate the ridiculousness. (Zoe Lister-Jones, as Bette's sour sister Joan, in particular, plays her part as if she were Rachel Dratch doing Debbie Downer.) It's possible that Bobbie is picking up on a certain competitiveness in the playwright. He wants us to know that Durang, who is gay, is better than these hopeless straight characters. It's a note that Durang himself struck in a recent *Times* interview, in which he referred to "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" as his "one unabashedly autobiographical play." "My relationship with my partner has lasted twenty-three years and my parents' bumpy marriage lasted fifteen years," Durang said. "So I win." The only thing a playwright should be concerned with winning is a greater command over the truth and his art. ♦

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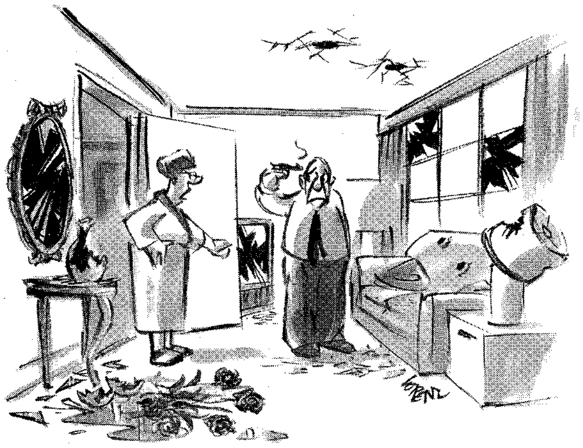
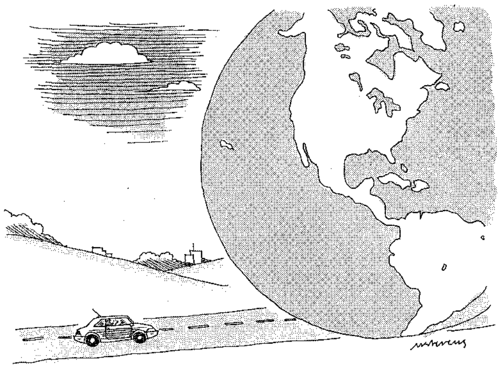
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, July 27th. Finalists in the July 7th & 14th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 11th & 18th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Just come to bed and kill yourself in the morning."
Marcos El Malo, Los Angeles, Calif.



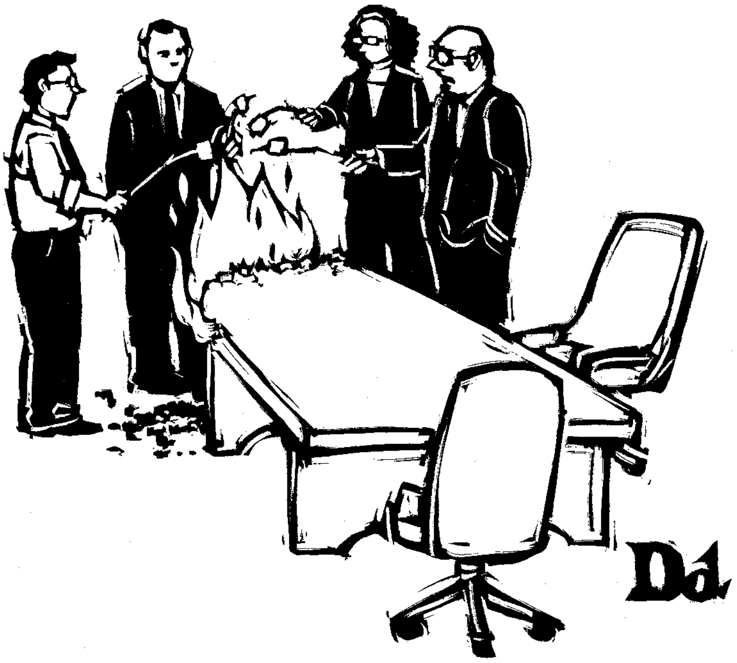
THE FINALISTS

"Why do I always get stuck behind the slow planets?"
Brian Ahern, Long Beach, N.Y.

"Oh, great, we're stuck behind a four-and-a-half-billion-year-old."
Ari Stern, North Hollywood, Calif.

"Honey, I told you the whole world is headed to the Cape this weekend."
Terri-Lee Burger, Brooklyn, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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Olga Mendez
Human Resources Manager, Verizon Wireless

Olga Mendez trains employees at a Verizon Wireless call center. But she also helps the company teach another important skill: life.

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A survivor of an abusive relationship herself, Olga gives women the support and practical advice they need to help break the cycle of domestic violence and strike out in the world on their own.

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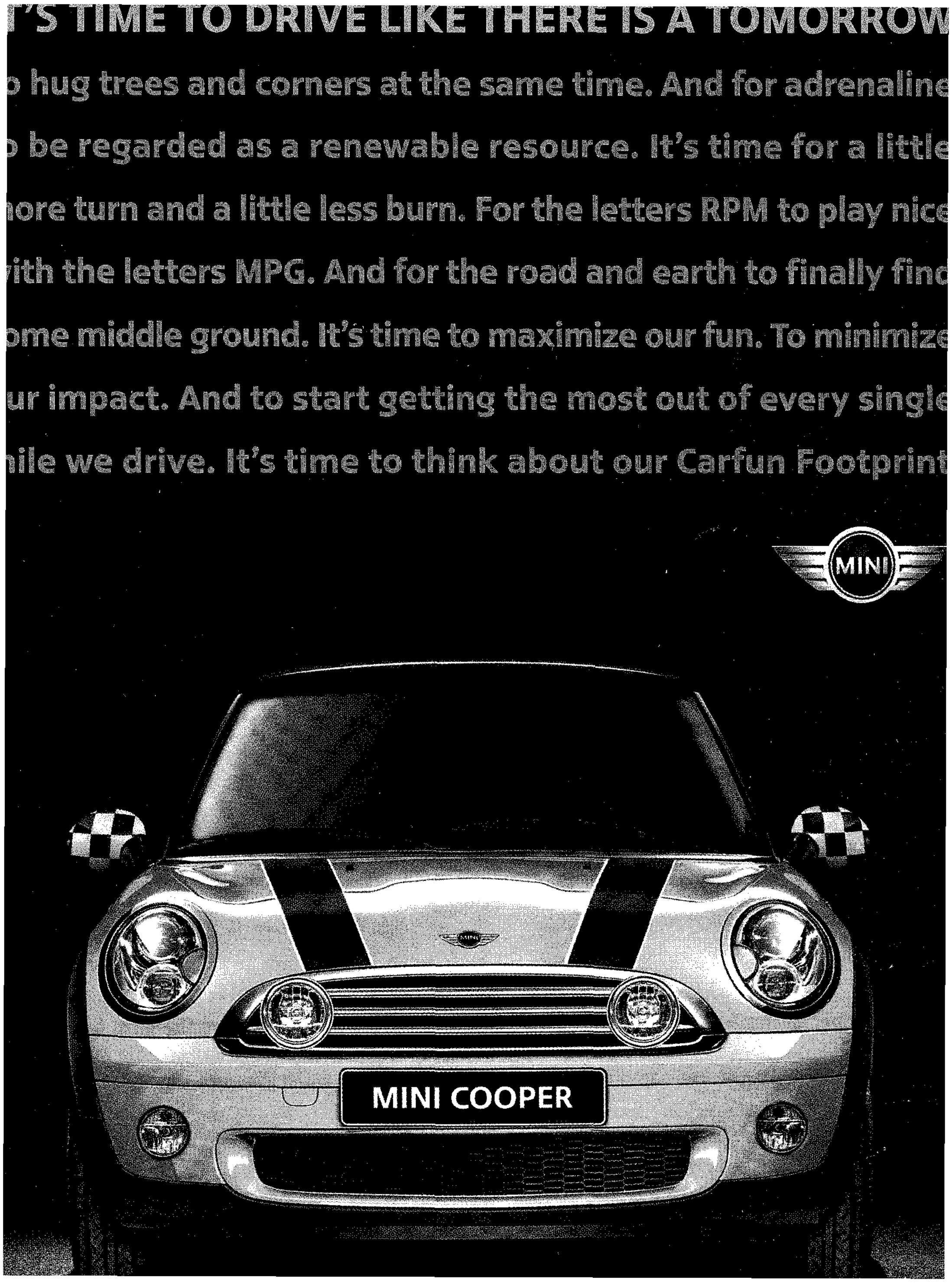

’S TIME TO DRIVE LIKE THERE IS A TOMORROW

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